NATION

Navy gets 3rd nuclear submarine INS Aridaman

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BUSINESS

RBI unveils ₹2.54 lakh crore state borrowing plan for Q1

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SPORTS

DC seek top-order stability against MI

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Russia offers more crude oil, LNG to India

Amid closure of Hormuz, India turns to Russia for support

Autos line up outside a gas station at Kengeri Satellite Town, in Bengaluru, on Friday, in the hopes of refuelling. Drivers across the State have been lining up outside bunks from early in the morning —MOHAMMED ASAD

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

With the West Asia crisis continuing to drive volatility in the global energy market, Russia has offered to increase supply of crude oil and natural gas to India even as the two sides agreed to further enhance the overall bilateral ties.

The energy cooperation figured prominently in meetings Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov held with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday, sources said. Manturov also held talks with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi last evening.

"Russian companies have the capacity to steadily increase supplies of oil and liquefied natural gas to the Indian market," a Russian readout of Manturov's meetings said.

Global oil and gas prices have surged after Iran virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, that handles roughly 20 per cent of global oil and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas). West Asia has been a major source of India's energy procurement.

"Specific steps were discussed to create favorable conditions for increasing bilateral trade turnover," it said.

The Ministry of External Affairs said both sides held wide ranging discussions focusing on trade, industry, energy, fertilisers, connectivity and mobility in addition to new opportunities in technology, innovation and critical minerals.

Notably, this comes as Russia has banned producers from exporting gasoline until the end of July. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pgs 4, 5 ,6,7

WEST ASIA WAR
DAY-35

5 Indians
among 12 injured in Abu Dabhi

LPG supply in India is stable, and around
28 lakh
cylinders are being delivered daily. Avoid panic buying: Indian Oil Corporation (IOC)

"With a little more time, we can easily open the Hormuz Strait, take the oil and make a fortune. It would be a gusher for the world

—Donald Trump, US President

IRAN SHOOTS DOWN US F35 JET, ONE PILOT RESCUED

DUBAI, 3 APRIL

Iran shot down a F35 jet operated by the US. Iran said that fighter pilot ejected from the aircraft over southwestern Iran. It is unclear how many pilots were aboard the jet, but US and Israeli officials said that one pilot was rescued.

The US confirmed that the jet was shot down and said it launched rescue operations.

This could lead to yet another dramatic escalation in the war, nearing the end of its fifth week.

This is the first US jet that Washington confirmed that it had been lost a jet in Iranian territory.

Notably, the F35 jet is one of the most advanced warplanes.

An anchor Iranian state-media urged residents to hand over any "enemy pilot" to police and promised a reward. The channel showed metal debris on a pickup truck. An on-screen crawl earlier urged the public to "shoot them if you see them," referring to a US aircraft in the area.

Iran previously claimed to have shot an F35. The US did not confirm it , but said that a jet had to make an emergency landing. —*PTI*

UNSC to vote on whether to 'defend' Hormuz

The UN Security Council will vote on a draft resolution proposed by Bahrain Saturday on reopening the Strait of Hormuz. The draft Security Council authorises states to take "exclusively defensive measures" to secure transit passage and deter any acts to impede international navigation through the Strait. It also provides a clear legal basis for all States to mobilise and support safe passage while following international law and international humanitarian law. Permanent members China and Russia voiced opposition to earlier versions of the text that would have allowed use of force by countries. However, Bahrain has removed that clause.

Google allows US users to change Gmail address

NEW YORK, 3 APRIL

Google has started allowing users in the United States to change their Gmail addresses, after a quiet rollout in India last year. CEO Sundar Pichai said the update will help those who want to update their handles, stating, "2004 was a good year, but your Gmail address doesn't need to be stuck in it." The process involves visiting your Google Account page, selecting 'Manage your Google Account,' and clicking 'Change Google Account email.' Old addresses remain accessible, and messages to both addresses will appear in the inbox. —*PTI*

Ex-Lokayukta Santosh Hegde collapses; stable

BENGALURU, 3 APRIL

Former Karnataka Lokayukta justice N Santosh Hegde collapsed during a public event in the city on Friday and was admitted to a private hospital. The 85-year-old former Supreme Court judge fell ill at a felicitation programme for former minister PGR Sindhia, organised by the Bharat Scouts and Guides at Kondajji Basappa Auditorium. "After speaking for a while, he sat down, felt dizzy, vomited, and collapsed. Those present gave him water, but there was no improvement," said Dr Ramesh Babu, who provided initial treatment at the venue. Hegde was later rushed to a Manipal Hospital in the official vehicle of Legislative Assembly Speaker UT Khader. Doctors said Hegde, who is diabetic, may have suffered a sudden drop in blood sugar levels. He is said to be recovering. —*PTI*

CBSE pushes for 3-language system in 26-27 curriculum

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has rolled out its new curriculum for the 2026-27 academic session. The new curriculum, according to officials, entailed launching a phased implementation of the three-language formula from Class 6 and a two-level system of mathematics and science for Class 9 starting in the 2026-27 academic session. While the three-language formula mandated under the new National Education Policy (NEP) will be implemented from 2026 for Class 6, introduction of the two-level system of mandatory standard and optional advanced courses in mathematics and science will be done for Class 9. Computational thinking and artificial intelligence will also be introduced as compulsory subjects for classes 9 and 10. —*PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGE 4

SHIP CARRYING IRANIAN OIL REROUTES FROM INDIA TO CHINA

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

A US-sanctioned tanker carrying Iranian crude oil has rerouted mid-voyage from its previously indicated destination of India - where it would have marked the first such shipment in nearly seven years - to China.

The Aframax tanker Ping Shun, built in 2002 and sanctioned by the US in 2025, is now signalling Dongying in China as its destination instead of Vadinar in Gujarat, which it had indicated earlier this week, according to ship-tracking firm Kpler.

There is no confirmation that the destination that the ship's Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponder - a tracking system mandated on most commercial vessels - is indicating is the final and it may not change at any time during the transit.

Ping Shun is estimated to be carrying about 6,00,000 barrels of oil that was loaded from Kharg Island around 4 March.

The shift in destination appears to be payment-related, with sellers tightening terms, moving away from the earlier 30-60 day credit window toward upfront or near-term settlement, said Sumit Ritolia, an analyst at commodity market analytic firm Kpler. However, it is not clear who the actual seller and buyer were.

The oil would have been the first Iranian crude that India purchased since 2019, as New Delhi has been looking to buy from Tehran after US lifted sanctions. —*PTI*

Poster boy Annamalai missing in BJP's TN list

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The BJP on Friday released a list of 27 candidates for the Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, fielding Union minister L Murugan from Avanashi seat and former Telangana governor Tamilisai Soundararajan from Mylapore. But its former state president K Annamalai is not in the electoral fray.

The absence of Annamalai, a former IPS officer who was the face of the party during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, comes amidst reports of differences over seat allocation. Annamalai unsuccessfully contested from Aravakurichi in the 2021 Assembly election and also lost the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

BJP Mahila Morcha National President Vanathi Srinivasan will enter the fray from Coimbatore (North). The party has named Kirthika Shivkumar as its candidate from Modakkurichi, S Vijayadharani from Vilavancode and Nagesh Kumar from the Thalli seat.

Union Minister and BJP's state in-charge Piyush Goyal said Annamalai was a "dedicated soldier" and decided to work across the state instead of one constituency. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

"In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, they asked me to contest. Now, nobody has asked me to contest. I did not seek an opportunity, and I am carrying out the tasks assigned to me. If the party decides and asks me to contest, I will

—K Annamalai, BJP leader

GOOD FRIDAY

Devotees attend Good Friday prayers at St Francis Xavier Church in Bengaluru. Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and is observed on the Friday before Easter —MOHAMMED ASAD

Will keep 500 CAPF deployed in Bengal post polls: EC

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The Election Commission (EC) has ordered 50,000 security personnel to remain in West Bengal even after the counting of votes on 4 May .

The EC will also retain 200 Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) companies to guard voting machines and counting centres till the completion of counting in the state. One company comprises 90 to 125 central security personnel.

The decision follows a mob holding election officials hostage in Malda on Wednesday, which the Supreme Court declared a "complete failure" of state security.

The court handed over the probe into the National Investigation Agency (NIA). Authorities said they have arrested the "mastermind".

West Bengal's assembly polls will take place in two phases, on 23 and 29 April —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

People can bathe in Ganga, pollution declining: Centre

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Ganga water meets bathing standards at all monitored locations and pollution levels in the river are declining, according to the government.

In a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Jal Shakti Raj Bhushan Choudhary on Thursday said pH and dissolved oxygen levels of the river meet the required norms for bathing criteria across all locations, based on median water quality data for 2025 (January to August). He said the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) monitors water quality of the River Ganga at 112 locations across five states. Only in certain stretches of Uttar Pradesh, including Farrukhabad to Purana Rajapur, Dalmau in Raebareli, and Mirzapur to Tarighat is the water not up to the mark, he said. —*PTI*

MASSIVE RAINFALL EXPECTED

1,000km long cloud builds up over India, Pakistan

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

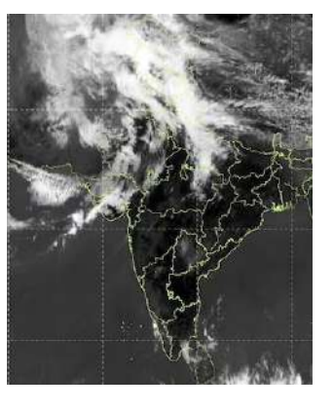
New satellite images released by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) captured massive cloud formation stretching nearly 1,000 kilometres across parts of India and Pakistan, signalling an approaching spell of rain driven by a western disturbance.

The dense cloud band across northwest India and adjoining Pakistan indicates a significant weather system moving eastward.

The western disturbance, a periodic weather phenomenon originating over the Mediterranean region, is expected to bring widespread rainfall, thunderstorms, and gusty winds over several northern and northwestern states in the coming days.

Thick multi-layered cloud cover extended across regions including Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana parts of Rajasthan and across the border into Pakistan.

Weather experts have warned that the system could trigger moderate to heavy rainfall, accompanied by lightning and short-duration intense showers.



Hailstorms and sudden temperature drops are also possible particularly over the plains and foothills of the Himalayas.

The IMD has advised residents and farmers to stay alert, as the rainfall could impact standing crops and disrupt daily activities.

Meanwhile, Karachi in Pakistan recorded its heaviest 24-hour rainfall starting from 2 April, breaking a 41-year-old record. Karachi received 38.6 mm rainfall during the 24 hours, surpassing the previous record of 37.0 millimetres from 1985.

Several rain related deaths have been reported in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The IMD also forecast thunderstorms in at one or two places over north Bengal districts from 5 April, with the intensity being higher in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Cooch Behar till 8 April. —*Agencies*

– PTI

Two arrested for knifepoint robbery in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 3 APRIL

Two men have been detained for allegedly robbing a man at knifepoint after seeking a lift on his two-wheeler in the City, police reported on Friday. The suspects, arrested within a day of the complaint, assaulted the victim with a knife and helmet before fleeing with his vehicle, mobile phone, and purse. The victim, a manager at a Kalyana Mantapa in Nellukunte, filed a police report at Chikkajala Police Station on 26 March. The incident occurred at around 2.30am on 25 March near D-Mart on Hosahalli Road, when the accused asked for a lift, then attacked him and stole his belongings. Police recovered the stolen items worth Rs 2.20 lakh after arresting the suspects near Hunasamaranahalli on 26 March. Both were remanded to judicial custody on 27 March.—*PTI*

Chinnara Mela 2026 applications to be available on 5 April

MYSURU, 3 APRIL

The 22nd edition of Chinnara Mela 2026, a month-long summer camp for children aged 7 to 16 organised by Rangayana Mysuru, will run from 14 April to 19 May at Rangayana premises. The camp features children's theatre, folk arts, and creative activities, culminating in Chinnara Santhe. Applications will be distributed on 5 April at the Rangayana office in Kalamandir premises at 10am on a first-come, first-served basis, with only 250 applications available. Parents can obtain applications after paying Rs 100 each. The completed form, along with a Rs 4000 demand draft in the name of the Director of Rangayana Mysuru and the payment receipt, must be submitted by April 9 at 5 pm. Applicants must include the child's name, date of birth certificate, and Aadhar card as proof of age.—*SALAR NEWS*

Missing case turns out to be murder, burnt body found

GADAG, 3 APRIL

A missing case from Huilagol village has turned into a murder investigation, with police uncovering a crime linked to an illicit relationship. Chandru Kuri, who had gone missing, was later found dead in a burnt condition. Police arrested his lover Ratna Kudari, her husband Eerappa, and her brother Mahantesh. Chandru and Ratna were in a relationship despite her marriage, which had caused tension in the family. On 25 March, Ratna allegedly lured Chandru to her house, where Eerappa and Mahantesh attacked him. They later slit his throat near a deserted bridge and burnt the body. The accused were arrested in Dharwad. —*SALAR NEWS*

Guv asks State to rethink 3rd language grade in SSLC

Forwards complaint on grading system to Chief Secretary

BENGALURU, 3 APRIL

Governor Thawarchand Gehlot called for a comprehensive examination of concerns over the State government's decision to award only grades, without marks, for the third language in the SSLC exams.

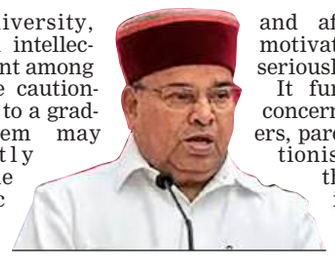
This follows a representation highlighting its potential impact on academic engagement and linguistic diversity.

Secretary to Governor R Prabhu Shankar forwarded a representation submitted by the Association for Preservation of Local Languages, Bengaluru, which raised the apprehensions about the policy to State Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh,

"I am directed to forward herewith a copy of a representation submitted by the Association for Preservation of Local Languages, Bengaluru, which has been addressed to the Governor **Thawarchand Gehlot**," the letter stated.

The representation underscored the importance of the third language in promoting linguistic diversity, awareness and intellectual development among students, while cautioning that a shift to a grading-only system may inadvertently diminish the academic importance of the subject and affect students' motivation to engage seriously with it.

The representation underscored the importance of the third language in promoting linguistic diversity among students —*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*



It further reflected concerns among teachers, parents and educationists regarding the long-term implications of the move on the quality and inclusiveness of school education in the state.

> **We are not anti-Hindi, but it should not be enforced on students. Whoever wants to learn Hindi can do so**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

"The Governor has taken note of the issues raised in the representation and desired that the matter be examined comprehensively, keeping in view its academic and administrative aspects across the education sector," the communication said.

The Chief Secretary has been requested to examine the matter in consultation with the Department of School Education and other concerned authorities and "take such action as deemed appropriate in the larger interest of students and the State's educational objectives," it further stated. —*PTI*

COPS RULE OUT 'LOVE JIHAD'

Gym trainer beaten in Hubballi, accused of rape

HUBBALLI, 3 APRIL

A 23-year-old gym trainer was allegedly assaulted on Friday after being taken away by a group following a confrontation linked to his relationship with a girl here, police said.

The 20-year-old woman has released a video statement alleging that the trainer, Sameer Mulla, took her to his house, gave her a drink and raped her.

She alleged that he recorded a video of the act and later used it to blackmail her. The police are probing the matter.

City Police Commissioner N Shashikumar said the incident stemmed from a personal dispute between two families and was not related to 'love jihad'.

The incident took place in the morning, when a group of people went to the youth's house, leading to a confrontation.

He was later found and admitted to the hospital with injuries. The family has also filed a complaint with the police.

Sameer's sister, Taiseem Mulla, demanded strict action against those involved.

According to her, Sameer and the woman had been in a relationship for the past three years and photos and videos of the two were circulated in a group before the incident.

Refuting allegations of 'love jihad', she said the family respects all religions and only seeks justice for her brother.

In her video statement, the woman said she was friends with Taiseem and attended several events, including birthday and weekend parties, where Sameer was also present. He gradually became close to her and then took her to his home and raped her.

The woman's mother denied that any relationship existed between them.

She also claimed that Sameer and his family had been harassing her daughter for the past four to five days.

"They came to our house with the intention of setting it on fire. They brought petrol, hockey sticks and swords and attacked us," she said. —*PTI*

CM defends picking kin of deceased MLAs for bypolls

DAVANGERE, 3 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday defended the Congress' decision to field family members of two deceased MLAs in Assembly by-elections, asserting that the move follows established political practice.

Addressing criticism from the BJP over alleged dynastic politics, he said the party had followed a "common practice" in selecting candidates for the upcoming bypolls in the State.

The bypolls were necessitated by the demise of sitting Congress MLAs Shamanur Shivashankarappa and HY Meti, who represented the Davanagere South and Bagalkote constituencies, respectively. The Congress has fielded Samarth, Shivashankarappa's grandson and son of Minister SS Mallikarjun, in Davangere, and Umesh Meti in Bagalkot. They will face BJP's T Dasakariyappa in Davangere South and Veerabhadrayya Charantimath in Bagalkot.

- Opposition parties are likely to perform strongly in several regions. But in West Bengal, the ruling TMC will retain power; in Tamil Nadu, the DMK will win; and in Kerala, the UDF will win, Siddaramaiah said.

Siddaramaiah said that minorities have supported Congress "since Independence" and "this election is no different", expressing confidence that his party would retain the seats.

Commenting on elections in other states, he said Opposition parties are likely to perform strongly in several regions. But in West Bengal, the ruling TMC will retain power; in Tamil Nadu, the DMK will win; and in Kerala, the UDF is likely to emerge victorious.

"In Assam and other states, Opposition parties are likely to perform well. The BJP will not win everywhere," the Chief Minister said. —*PTI*

REGISTERS 1.49% GROWTH

Mysuru SWR earns record Rs 449.13 cr

MYSURU, 3 APRIL

The South Western Railway's Mysuru division has recorded its highest-ever passenger revenue of Rs 449.13 crore in 2025–26, surpassing the previous Rs 419.89 crore and registering a growth of 1.49 per cent. Divisional Railway Manager Mudit Mittal said the division achieved significant progress across revenue, freight, infrastructure, safety and passenger services.

Ticket checking earnings touched a record Rs 9.75 crore, while non-fare revenue streams such as publicity (Rs 3.17 crore), parking (Rs 4.02 crore) and catering (Rs 2.61 crore) also reached all-time highs.

Parcel revenue stood at Rs 11.81 crore, with leasing through SLR and VPH contributing Rs 5.85 crore.

Freight revenue remained strong at Rs 900.19 crore, the second highest in the division's history, with total loading at 10.586 million tonnes. This included 8.664 million tonnes of iron ore and record automobile loading of 116 NMG rakes, generating Rs 23.94 crore.

Mittal said key digital initiatives included the commissioning of a Non-Rail Head PRS facility at Kuvempunagar which improved the access to seamless and cashless ticketing.

Energy efficiency initiatives yielded results, with energy consumption reduced from 91.34 MU to 90.53 MU, despite an increase in connected load. Solar capacity expanded from 125 kWp to 326 kWp (160 per cent growth). —*Salar News*

Driver of bus in Haveri accident was a trainee

HAVERI, 3 APRIL

A preliminary investigation has revealed that the bus accident that occurred at the Haveri Central Bus Stand, killing a toddler and injuring four others. was caused due to negligence on the part of the driver.

The Transport Department found that the driver mistakenly pressed the accelerator instead of the brake, which led to the bus entering the platform.

Initial investigations revealed that the driver Manjunath R, 33, had joined service only eight months ago. As per rules, he is considered a trainee driver for one year. He did not drive the vehicle under the influence of alcohol.

Sub-inspector, Haveri traffic police, Shailashree told salar news, "The child and his parents from Raichur's Savanur had come to Haveri. While they were waiting on platform no 2 of the bus stand, a bus running on the Haveri–Lakshmeshwar route suddenly rammed into the platform."

Police have taken Manjunath into custody. A case was registered.

Divisional controller for the Haveri division of the North Western Karnataka Road Transport Corporation, Vijayakumar G told Salar News, "Steps have been initiated to suspend the driver. The vehicle was handed over to the driver. —*PTI*

Ragi procurement centres take 4kg extra per farmer: Sa Ra

MYSURU, 3 APRIL

Former Minister Sa Ra Mahesh called on the government to end the injustice faced by farmers at Ragi procurement centres. Mahesh highlighted that despite fixing a support price and establishing procurement centres, these centres are taking an additional 4kg of ragi per farmer.

Speaking at a press conference in Mysuru, he expressed concern about the severe distress caused by unfair crop pricing, alleging that government centres are exploiting farmers instead of supporting them in KR Nagar and other taluks.

He stated that approximately 60,000 quintals of Ragi have been procured, resulting in farmers losing Rs 200 to Rs 250 per quintal.

Mahesh questioned the transparency of funds allocated for transportation and labour, asking, "Where are these funds really going?"

He criticised Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for not protecting farmers' and accused the Food and Civil Supplies Department of negligence.

Mahesh demanded accountability, warned that exploitation is widespread across the State, and urged the government to compensate farmers and dismantle the "transport lobby." He cautioned protests during the next Mysuru visit if grievances are not addressed. —*Salar News*

NO 'FARE'

Autorickshaws wait in queue, not for passengers but to fill LPG, at St Mark's Road in Bengaluru on Friday. Drivers rushed in the early hours to fill up gas amid reported scarcity of LPG - *MOHAMMED ASAD*

SHIVAMOGGA TRAGEDY

Pregnant nurse kills self over 'harassment', in-laws arrested

SHIVAMOGGA, 3 APRIL

A 30-year-old woman, who was four months pregnant, died by suicide in Soraba, Shivamogga district, on Sunday. The deceased, Swetha, worked as a private staff nurse. She reportedly doused herself with petrol and set herself on fire.

In their complaint at the Soraba Police Station, Swetha's parents said their daughter was distressed from the harassment by her in-laws. They accused her mother-in-law, Janaki, father-in-law Channappa, brother-in-law Hemanth, and relatives—Divya, Manjamma, Sujatha—of pouring petrol on her.

Based on the complaint, police registered a case and arrested four individuals, including her in-laws.

Swetha was rushed to Manipal Hospital in Udupi district. "90 per cent of her body, including her face, was burnt," the police complaint stated. "She fought for her life for three days; however, on the night of 1 April, she succumbed to her injuries." Doctors attempted emergency surgery to save her unborn child, but it was not possible.

Her husband, Naveen, said, "They (in-laws) harassed us so much that I don't feel like calling them my parents. If not for our little daughter, I might not have been alive by now."

Shwetha's father, Manjappa, said, "She would come home late, but not say anything when we asked. We never imagined she would leave us so soon" —*Salar News*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

80 wheat sacks buried in school premises

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 3 APRIL

Approximately 80 sacks of wheat buried underground near the Kittur Rani Chennamma Residential School at H Rangapura (Doranalu) in Chikkamagaluru district have been discovered, prompting an investigation by the Social Welfare Department.

Officials suspect the wheat had been buried nearly two years ago and are probing the circumstances surrounding the incident. The matter came to light after S Shivamurthy, Vice President of the Vishwamanava Dr BR Ambedkar Protection Forum, filed a Right to Information (RTI) application on 17 February asking "how much food material has been spoiled since 2023, and how was it disposed of"?

In its 24 February reply, the department claimed that no food grains had been wasted and that meals were being served as per the prescribed menu. However, Shivamurthy later lodged a complaint alleging that 70–80 sacks of wheat had been illegally buried.

Acting on the complaint, Deputy Director Malathi ordered an inquiry. District Coordinator Rajappa, appointed as the investigating officer, visited the site and supervised excavation, leading to the recovery of the wheat sacks buried about four feet underground.

The school principal has informed authorities that over 50 sacks were recovered and that they do not belong to the current stock. Shivamurthy has demanded strict action, alleging the grains were allowed to spoil and buried to conceal negligence. —*Salar News*

Wheat sacks buried near Kittur Rani Chennamma Residential School in Chikkamagaluru district sparked welfare investigation —*SALAR*

‘Mastermind’ behind Malda gherao held

Mamata blames ‘cuckoo’ AIMIM, ISF for gherao; accuses Congress, BJP of instigation

KOLKATA/ HARIRAMPUR/ NEW DELHI/GAZOLE, 3 APRIL

The West Bengal Police on Friday arrested two persons, including the alleged mastermind of the gherao of seven judicial officers in Malda district, from Siliguri’s Bagdogra airport, a senior officer said.

The alleged mastermind, identified as advocate Mofakkarul Islam, was arrested while he was trying to board a flight, he said.

Three cases have been registered against him at Kaliachak police station for allegedly “instigating” locals through speeches on Wednesday, following which the seven judicial officers were gheraoed inside the Kaliachak-2 block office under Mothabari assembly constituency, he said.

With the latest apprehension, the police have so far arrested 35 people, including an ISF candidate, for their alleged involvement in the incident, he added.

Meanwhile, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday blamed the AIMIM and ISF for the gherao of judicial officers in Malda district and accused the Congress and the BJP of instigation.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee waves during a public rally ahead of the Assembly elections, at Harirampur in Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, on Friday —PTI

> I have been arrested from Bagdogra airport. I was at the protests against the deletion of voters that is why I have been arrested
>
>
>
> -Mofakkerul Islam, Calcutta HC Advocate

Banerjee claimed that this police organisation is still under her control and not of the Election Commission.

“The BJP loaned him (the accused) from the AIMIM and brought him here,” she alleged, while addressing an election rally at Harirampur in Dakshin Dinajpur district.

Additionally, Banerjee mocked Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s announcement that he would camp in the state for 15 days, declaring that even 365 days would not help the BJP because “people of Bengal do not like you”.

Banerjee also turned her guns on AIMIM Chief Asaduddin Owaisi without naming him, accusing the “Hyderabad cuckoo of the BJP” of engineering the protests in Malda.

Banerjee said, “The cuckoo is born in the crow’s nest. Offer them mangoes if you want, but do not give them your votes.”

Incidentally in West Bengal, the EC on Friday decided to continue deployment of 500 companies of central forces in the state even after counting of votes on 4 May, amid law-and-order concerns in the state. One company comprises 90 to 125 personnel.

Additionally, 200 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) will be retained in the state for security arrangements of electronic voting machines (EVMs), strong room and counting centres. —PTI

—PTI

NCP leaders meet in Delhi amid rumours of dissent

MUMBAI, 3 APRIL

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and NCP president Sunetra Pawar, along with her son Parth, met senior party leader Praful Patel at his residence in New Delhi on Thursday night, a party spokesperson confirmed. The meeting is significant as Parth Pawar last week dismissed reports claiming Patel and Sunil Tatkare attempted to take over the party following the death of former state Dy chief minister Ajit Pawar. Parth called these reports “unfounded and speculative.” Rohit Pawar said Sunetra wrote to the EC on 10 March, about her appointment as party president. She alleged Patel and Tatkare tried to seize control citing constitutional amendments. Sunetra was elected party president on 26 February, and she took oath as Deputy CM on 31 January. —PTI

‘Rape-accused godman & Shinde exchanged 17 calls’

MUMBAI, 3 APRIL

Activist Anjali Damania on Friday alleged that at least 17 calls were exchanged between Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and rape-accused godman Ashok Kharat during unspecified period in the past. Some BJP and NCP leaders too had spoken with the self-styled godman on phone, she told a Marathi news channel. Reacting to the allegations, state Minister Uday Samant who belongs to Shinde-led Shiv Sena said that making phone calls to a person is not a crime. She claimed that she received Kharat’s Call Detail Records (CDR) on WhatsApp from an unknown number. She also said that as per the CDR, his wife Kharat spoke longest on call with NCP Chief Rupali Chakankar. —PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a roadshow ahead of the Assembly elections, in Puducherry, on Friday —PTI

Modi holds grand roadshow in Puducherry

PUDUCHERRY, 3 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a grand roadshow here on Friday and sought support for the AINRC-BJP alliance in the 9 April election to the territorial Assembly.

The Prime Minister, flanked by AINRC founder leader Chief Minister N Rangasamy and BJP leader, Home Minister A Namassivayam, held his roadshow between the Ajanta signal point and the Kamarajar statue/Raja theatre signal, a distance of less than 2km, and it took nearly an hour for the show to conclude.

Earlier, on his arrival, he was accorded a rousing welcome by the BJP workers amid chants of 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' and 'Jai Shri Ram'. As the PM's open campaign vehicle slowly moved on, he waved at the people, and they showered flowers on him and his campaign vehicle.

Flags of the BJP-AINR Congress fluttered all across the city, and it was maximum from the SV Patel Road, the starting point of the roadshow and till the Anna Salai-Kamarajar Salai junction where the event culminated.

Cultural shows and traditional dance programmes added colour and spice to the PM’s roadshow in Puducherry. A large number of supporters had gathered well in advance to welcome Modi. During his visit to the Union territory last month, Modi inaugurated projects worth over Rs 2,700 crore. —PTI

Discrepancies found in Vijay’s poll affidavits for 2 seats

CHENNAI, 3 APRIL

Discrepancies have surfaced in two separate election affidavits submitted by actor and TVK founder Vijay, potentially inviting legal and political scrutiny ahead of the assembly elections in Tamil Nadu.

The contrasting documents, prepared for the Perambur and Tiruchirappalli East constituencies, reveal contradictory declarations regarding his pending criminal cases and designated election bank accounts.

The affidavit prepared for the Perambur Assembly constituency, which was notarised in Chennai on 30 March, explicitly claims that the political leader has no pending criminal cases against him. A subsequent affidavit drafted for the Tiruchirappalli East constituency, notarised three days later in Tiruchirapalli, declares two pending First Information Reports (FIRs).

Actor and TVK founder Vijay —PTI

In addition to the criminal record discrepancy, the financial declarations related to election expenditure also differ.

The Perambur document lists a single bank account opened for election expenses at the Indian Overseas Bank, Saligramam branch, containing a deposit of Rs 1 lakh.

The Trichy affidavit, however, lists two separate accounts, maintaining the Saligramam account for Perambur and adding another account at the Indian Overseas Bank Tiruchirappalli Main branch with a balance of Rs 90,000. —PTI

CONGRESS NAMES 27 CANDIDATES FOR TN POLLS

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The Congress on Friday announced a list of 27 candidates for the 23 April Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu.

Among the key candidates, Tamil Nadu Congress President K Selvaperunthagai will contest the Sriperumbudur SC constituency, while former MP Dr A Chella Kumar will represent Krishnagiri Assembly Constituency.

Other notable selections include Durai Chandrasekar from Ponneri (SC), Gopinath Palaniyappar from Erode (East), and Rama Karumanickam from Tiruvadana.

The candidates were chosen by the Central Election Committee after careful consideration.

The Congress will contest 28 out of 234 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu in a coalition with the ruling DMK.

The election results will be announced on 4 May. —PTI

Lottery king Martin’s family to debut in 3 parties

CHENNAI/ PUDUCHERRY, 3 APRIL

The Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Puducherry unfolded an array of candidates from the lottery ‘king’ Santiago Martin’s family seeking their electoral fortunes through three different political parties.

Martin’s wife Leema Rose, who joined the AIADMK recently, has been fielded from the Lalgudi Assembly constituency in Tiruchirappalli.

Her son Jose Charles Martin, who launched his own political party, the Latchiya Jananayaga Katchi (LJK) is contesting from Kamaraj Nagar in the Union Territory as part of the AINRC-led NDA.

Rose’s son-in-law, Aadhav Arjuna, who shifted his loyalty to the Vijay-led TVK in February 2025, after serving in the Thol Thirumavalavan-led VCK, is contesting from Villivakkam in Chennai.

All three are making their electoral debut in the 9 April and 23 April polls. —PTI

Narayanasamy alleges bar licence, fake medicine scam

PUDUCHERRY, 3 APRIL

Veteran Congress leader **V Narayanasamy** alleged that the Chief Minister N Rangasamy-led Cabinet is “in the dock in the counterfeit drugs manufacturing scam involving supplies to 8 states” and claimed a “Rs 40 lakh bribe for a Resto bar licence”, while accusing the government of corruption.

He alleged “30 per cent commission collection in the Public Works Department” and irregularities in Smart City projects. Rangasamy has dismissed the charges as “baseless and unfounded” and said the matter is under CBI probe.

Narayanasamy said his 2016-2021 tenure ensured “good governance” and cited education and COVID-19 management. He alleged business declined after GST and pass percentage fell to about 73 per cent with high dropouts. He criticised the rise of bars from 400 to 800 and asked, “Will Puducherry be able to put up with 800 bars?”

On alliance issues, he said Congress and DMK were both responsible for seat-sharing confusion but called it a “minor setback”.

He said six unofficial candidates refused to withdraw despite party directions. The assembly elections will be held on 9 April next. —PTI

Revanth ridiculing Kerala: Vijayan

T’PURAM/KOZHIKODE, 3 APRIL

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday hit back at his Telangana counterpart Revanth Reddy after the latter's sharp criticism of the Left government during a campaign visit to the state.

In a Facebook post, Vijayan said the Telangana Chief Minister was "misinformed," and accused Reddy of "ridiculing" Kerala and its people while concealing the weaknesses of his own state.

"By conveniently ignoring the bulldozing of the homes of the poor in his own state, he appears ready to lecture Kerala on social progress and public welfare -- clearly, he has been seriously misinformed by someone," Vijayan wrote. He also invited Reddy to the state to learn about its welfare model.

EC NOTICE TO RAMAKRISHNAN

In a separate development, in Kozhikode the Election Commission issued a notice to LDF convener TP Ramakrishnan, who is contesting from Perambra assembly seat, seeking an explanation from him regarding a recorded announcement broadcast from a campaign vehicle of the Left front.

It reportedly said that the IUML, a key constituent of the Congress-led UDF, was running a communal campaign to seek votes for Thahiliya.

Ramakrishnan told a TV channel that the LDF does not agree with the announcement in question and it has not authorised any such recorded message. —PTI

‘PM, Himanta committed to uplift tribals’

DUDHNOI/PALASHBARI, 3 APRIL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma have prepared a roadmap for tribal development, and the BJP's return to power in the state would ensure its implementation.

Addressing a rally at Dudhnoi in Goalpara district, Shah said that Congress never made an Adivasi woman the country's President, but under BJP’s ruleDroupadi Murmu became the nation's first citizen.

>
>
> The Congress government had opened the gates for infiltrators for vote bank politics. During their tenure, women and land were not safe ... When you go to vote, you must remember the phase before that
>
> -Nitin Nabin, BJP National President

Shah said Modi has given Rs 1.38 lakh crore for the community.

Shah also asserted that tribal areas will not come under the ambit of the Uniform Civil Code.

Shah's first election rally at Golakgunj in Dhubri district was cancelled as his helicopter could not land due to technical reasons.

Senior Congress leader Pawan Khera accused BJP of diverting attention from key issues in Assam Assembly elections by creating controversies out of nothing. —PTI

AAP SLAMS HIS ‘SOFT PR’

Silenced, not defeated: Chadha hits back

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

A day after the AAP removed him as its Deputy leader in Rajya Sabha, MP Raghav Chadha Friday said he has been “silenced, not defeated”, prompting the party to launch an all-out attack, accusing him of shying away from raising his voice against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Centre in Parliament and instead engaging in “soft PR”.

As he appeared to be falling out of favour with the party’s leadership, Chadha vowed to hit back like a devastating ‘sailab’ (flood) at an opportune time.

Lambasting Chadha, AAP colleagues accused him of indulging in “soft PR” through issues like rate of samosas in airport canteens while avoiding real issues and attacking the prime minister and BJP government at the Centre.

MP Raghav Chadha —PTI

They also slammed him with ‘Jo Dar Gaya Samjho Mar Gaya’ jibe (Whoever gets scared is considered dead), over the intensifying bickering over his removal as deputy leader of the party in Rajya Sabha.

Chadha asserted that he was “silenced, not defeated” while sharing an Urudu couplet.

“Meri Khamoshi Ko Meri Haar Mat Samajh Lena, Main wo Dariya Hun Jo Waqt Aane Par Sailab Banta hai (Dont take my silence for my defeat, I am the river which turns into a devastating flood when time comes,” he read out the couplet for those who “snatched away his right to speak and silenced” him.

The MP said whenever he got a chance, he raised public issues in Parliament, including topics that are often overlooked, and questioned whether speaking about people’s problems was a crime.

Chadha said that in Parliament, he talked about the common people of the country and their issues, including expensive food at airports, problems faced by food delivery riders, food adulteration, toll plazas charges, mobile data expiry, tax on the middle class, among others.

Hitting back, the AAP sought an explanation from Chadha on why he is afraid to speak against the Modi government on issues of public interest.

On Thursday, the AAP replaced Chadha as its deputy Speaker in the Rajya Sabha with Ashok Mittal.

The move came amid Chadha’s prolonged silence on matters related to the AAP, and his absence from several public events led by Kejriwal. He becomes the second AAP Rajya Sabha member, after Swati Maliwal, to have fallen out with the party leadership. —PTI

Cong calls spl session on WB, TN violation of MCC

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The Congress on Friday alleged that the government has called a "special session" for passing bills related to amending the women's quota law and delimitation to "grab political mileage" in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu polls, which is a "gross violation" of the model code of conduct.

Congress General Secretary in-charge communications **Jairam Ramesh** said the government's push for rushed delimitation exercise would have "dangerous consequences", adding, "we do not want any disturbance in the present differentials and relative strength".

He said the government kept "sleeping" for 30 months after the passage of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, and to take "double credit" in the election season.

He said there has been no official communication or proposal from the government's side on delimitation.

"However, off the record, we got to know that there would be a proportionate increase in Lok Sabha seats," Ramesh said at a press conference here.

Leaders of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi are likely to meet senior party MPs and then with other opposition leaders before 16 April to work out a strategy on the matter. —PTI

Fake toothpaste factory busted in Delhi, owner held

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Delhi Police have busted a counterfeit toothpaste manufacturing unit at Mahaveer Vihar in outer Delhi's Khanjawala area, an official said on Friday. The owner, Mishra, 58, was arrested for operating the illegal unit from rented premises without a license or authorisation documents. Acting on a tip-off, a team raided the toothpaste godown on Thursday and "seized goods worth several lakhs, which posed serious health risks due to unhygienic manufacturing conditions," a senior police officer said. "During the operation, six labourers were seen filling locally prepared paste into tubes of a reputed toothpaste brand. The labourers said that the unit was run by one Hari Om Mishra, a resident of Rohini. —*PTI*

4 minors drown in UP river while filming videos

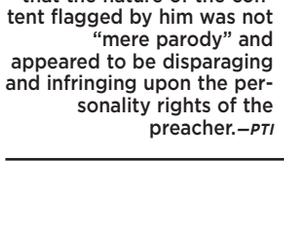
GORAKHPUR, 3 APRIL

Four minors drowned in Rapti river near Gorakhpur's Mirzapur ghat while reportedly attempting to record videos, officials said on Friday. According to police, five of nine boys entered the river near a pontoon bridge on Wednesday to bathe and film videos, but began drowning after venturing into deeper water. One, Rajkaran, swam to safety and alerted others. State and National Disaster Response Force teams launched a search soon after the incident and recovered all four bodies, officials said. The body of Vivek Nishad, 15 was recovered on 2 April about 100 metres from the site. The other three children—Aman, 15, Gagan Paswan, 15, and Aniket Yadav, 13, were found floating in the river on Friday. Their bodies were retrieved later.—*PTI*

3 more dead in hooch tragedy in 'dry' Bihar

MOTIHARI, 3 APRIL

The death toll in the suspected hooch tragedy rose to four on Friday after three more persons died allegedly due to consumption of spurious liquor in dry Bihar's East Champaran district. At least six others are undergoing treatment at a government hospital, while seven people have been discharged after initial treatment. The incident took place at Turkauliya and Raghunathpur areas of Motihari on 2 April. A total of 12 people, including a village chowkidar, were arrested in connection with the incident, while the SHO of Turkauliya Police Station was suspended.A special investigation team has been constituted to probe the incident. A murder case has been registered. The police are trying to nab the liquor supplier.—*PTI*



—SCREENGRAB

HC protects personality rights of preacher

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The Delhi High Court has upheld the personality rights of preacher Aniruddhacharya, known as 'Pookie' Baba, prohibiting the unauthorised use of his likeness, voice, and name. The restraint covers memes, videos, and AI-generated deepfakes. Aniruddhacharya's counsel said fabricated content misrepresents his teachings, damaging his goodwill among followers. Justice Tushar Rao Gedela ruled that the plaintiff, a well-known figure, has a strong initial case. The court directed social media entities, Meta, X and Google to take down any offending content identified by the plaintiff. The court stated that the nature of the content flagged by him was not "mere parody" and appeared to be disparaging and infringing upon the personality rights of the preacher.—*PTI*

Navy gets 3rd nuclear submarine INS Aridaman

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inducts frigate Taragiri

VISAKHAPATNAM, 3 APRIL

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday formally commissioned the indigenous nuclear-powered submarine INS Aridaman into the Indian Navy, marking a significant step in India's strategic maritime capabilities.

The INS Aridaman is the third vessel of the Arihant class nuclear submarines being built for the Indian Navy under the Project ATV at Vishakhapatnam.

The defence minister also inducted the frigate Taragiri in the city.

The induction of Taragiri comes at a time when the strategic and maritime importance of India's eastern seaboard continues to grow, driven by evolving regional security dynamics and India's deepening engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

The commissioning of Taragiri highlights the Navy's sustained focus on strengthening its combat readiness and operational might through its ambitious fleet augmentation programme.

Built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai, this frigate offers a sleeker form and a significantly reduced Radar Cross-Section that allows it to operate with lethal stealth.

INS Aridhaman is the third indigenously built nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine for the Indian Navy—*PTI*

Driven by a combined diesel or gas propulsion plant, Taragiri is designed for 'High-Speed - High Endurance' versatility and multi-dimensional maritime operations.

The ship's weapon suite is world-class, featuring supersonic Surface-to-Surface Missiles, Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missiles, and a specialised Anti-Submarine Warfare suite. These systems are seamlessly integrated through a state-of-the-art Combat Management System, ensuring that the crew can respond to threats with split-second precision.

Beyond its role as a premier hunter of the seas, Taragiri is built for the complexities of modern diplomacy and humanitarian crises.

Its flexible mission profile makes it ideal for everything from high-intensity combat to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).

The Indian Navy continues to grow as a combat-ready, cohesive, credible, Aatmanirbhar force, safeguarding the seas for a Viksit, Samriddha Bharat guarded by ships designed by Indians, built by Indians and operated by Indians.

The frigate stands ready for a promising future as a beacon of rising maritime power and an ironclad guardian looking over the country's blue frontiers. —*ANI*

OVER LACK OF CLARITY

Kin of India's 1st Iran war victim move HC, seek body's return

MUMBAI, 3 APRIL

- Dixit Solanki, 25, was killed on 4 March when an explosive-laden drone boat struck an oil tanker, MT MKD Vyom, off the coast of Oman amid the Iran war.

The family of seafarer Dixit Solanki who died in a suspected attack on a merchant vessel off the coast of Oman has moved the Bombay High Court, seeking the return of his mortal remains.

The petition, filed by Solanki's father Amratlal Solanki and sister, Mitali Solanki through advocates S B Talekar and Madhvi Ayyappan, has sought directions to the Union government to expedite the repatriation of his remains, claiming lack of clarity from the authorities.

Dixit Solanki, 25, was killed on 4 March when an explosive-laden drone boat struck an oil tanker, MT MKD Vyom, off the coast of Oman amid the West Asia conflict, becoming its first Indian casualty.

The Solankis have also sought that all investigation and forensic records be shared with them.

The plea has been filed against the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the Directorate General of Shipping, and V Ships India Pvt Ltd, which manages the vessel.

The plea claimed that the fundamental right to dignity extends to a person even after death and hence, the authorities must ensure the timely return of the mortal remains to the family.

It also relied on the legal obligations under the maritime regulations and guidelines that require proper handling and repatriation in cases of death at sea.

After the incident, the family struggled to get clear answers despite writing several emails to the company that owned the vessel.

The family only managed to receive replies from the company, which stated that efforts are underway to recover and repatriate the mortal remains of Dixit. —*PTI*

CBSE rolls out three-language formula; 2 levels of maths, science

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has launched a phased implementation of the three-language formula from Class 6 and a two-level system of mathematics and science for Class 9 starting in the 2026-27 academic session.

While the three-language formula mandated under the new National Education Policy (NEP) will be implemented from 2026 for Class 6, introduction of the two-level system of mandatory standard and optional advanced courses in mathematics and science will be done for Class 9.

"In structured three-language framework, as per recommendations of new

National Curriculum Framework, two of these three languages must be native to India. A third language will be made mandatory from Class 6," a senior board official said.

However, students returning from foreign schools where the third language studied till Class 8 or 9 is not available in domestic schools, they may be exempted, but have to study the total number of subjects as stipulated in the syllabus.

Meanwhile, all students will study the standard curriculum for mathematics and science and appear for an 80-mark examination. Those opting for higher proficiency can choose an additional 'advanced' level in either or both subjects.

Students must mandatorily take the standard exam, while the advanced paper remains optional. Students scoring 50 per cent or above will have the advanced-level qualification reflected separately in their mark sheet.

The two-level system will begin in the 2026–27 academic session for Class 9 students, and the first board exams for Class 10 students will be held in 2028. —*PTI*

Can disabled cadets be treated as ex-servicemen: SC

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The Supreme Court has inquired whether military cadets rendered unfit due to disabilities sustained during training can be granted ex-servicemen status, enabling them to access reservation benefits in government and semi-government jobs.

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan stated that most cadets are under 30 and in need of employment.

"During submissions, one aspect discussed was whether boarded-out cadets could also be considered ex-servicemen or ex-military personnel for reservation benefits," the bench said. "Learned ASG to seek instructions on this, so that the scope of ex-military personnel could include boarded-out cadets, since many are in their 20s and 30s," it added.

Additional Solicitor General N Venkataraman said the Union of India would respond comprehensively.

The court was hearing a suo motu case on difficulties faced by cadets discharged due to injury or disability. Last August, the court urged the defence forces to ensure "braveheart cadets" are not deterred by injuries, directing the Centre to explore insurance options for such incidents. —*PTI*

NCERT gets deemed-to-be university status

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has officially been declared a deemed-to-be university, enabling it to award its own degrees, officials announced.

"The Ministry of Education, on the advice of the University Grants Commission (UGC), NCERT along with its six constituent units have been declared as deemed to be University under a distinct category," an official notification stated.

These units include regional institutes of education in Ajmer, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Mysuru, Shillong, and the Pandit Sunderlal Sharma Central Institute of Vocational Education in Bhopal. As the apex organisation for school education, NCERT undertakes activities such as research, curriculum development, and creating teaching materials.

Three years ago, the Centre approved granting NCERT deemed-to-be university status in the 'De Novo' category, allowing it to establish new institutions in emerging areas of knowledge.

The notification stipulates that NCERT must avoid commercial or profit-making activities and ensure its programmes follow UGC norms.

NCERT is now authorised to initiate research, doctoral, and innovative academic programmes, participate in national rankings, and create an Academic Bank of Credits for digitally storing student credit scores. —*PTI*

J&K LG orders probe into Ganderbal encounter

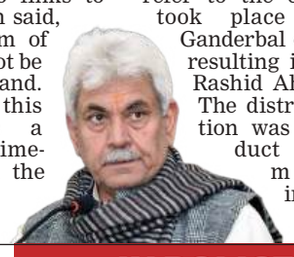
SRINAGAR, 3 APRIL

- Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti, questioned the encounter that occurred on the night of 30 March and 1 April.

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday ordered a magisterial inquiry into the Ganderbal encounter where one alleged terrorist was killed by security forces.

Several mainstream leaders, including Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti, questioned the encounter that occurred on the night of 30 March and 1 April.

The family of the deceased, Rashid Ahmad Mughal, claimed he had no links to terrorism. Abdullah said, "I believe the claim of the family should not be dismissed out of hand. At the very least this encounter needs a transparent & time-bound probe with the facts made public."



The Jammu and Kashmir Home Department has directed the Ganderbal district magistrate to complete the inquiry within seven days.

A communication from the department outlined, "Kindly refer to the encounter that took place at Arhama Ganderbal on 1 April 2026 resulting in the death of Rashid Ahmad Mughal." The district administration was asked to conduct an impartial magisterial inquiry. —*PTI*

'HURTS RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS'

Haridwar to relocate meat shops ahead of Ardh Kumbh

HARIDWAR, 3 APRIL

Ahead of the Ardh Kumbh 2027 in Uttarakhand, Haridwar administration has proposed to relocate all raw meat shops from within the city's urban limits to Sarai village on the outskirts.

Haridwar Mayor Kiran Jaiswal said that a draft proposal to this effect will be presented at the Municipal Corporation Board meeting on 6 April.

According to the Haridwar Municipal Corporation bylaws, the sale and consumption of meat, liquor and eggs are already prohibited within a five-kilometre radius of Har Ki Pauri, the city's main bathing ghat on the Ganga.

Jaiswal said although the municipal corporation has issued licences for only 20 meat shops, many more are operating illegally in the city.

"This not only creates unhygienic conditions but also aggravates the problem of stray dogs," the mayor said, adding that once the proposal is passed, action will be taken against illegally operating shops and fines will be imposed.

The Mansa Devi Temple Trust has welcomed the proposal. —*PTI*

IN POLICE CUSTODY

'Godman' ran credit societies, 132 accounts to amass wealth

MUMBAI, 3 APRIL

Self-styled godman Ashok Kharat, facing rape charges, opened over 130 accounts in two cooperative credit societies in Maharashtra under different names and carried out transactions worth Rs 63 crore in the past few years.

As per sources, one of the accounts was opened in the name of sister of former Maharashtra State Women's Commission chairperson Rupali Chakankar, who resigned from the post last month after her alleged links with Kharat came to light following his arrest in Nashik.

The case relates to the Kharat couple, residents of

Nashik, allegedly trying to grab four acres of land in the temple town of Shirdi after giving its owner a loan of Rs 5.52 crore.

The Shirdi police have arrested two middlemen in the case and are looking for Kharat's wife Kalpana and one more person.

In one of the credit societies, there were transactions of over Rs 60 crore and in the other, police have so far found transactions of more than Rs 2.74 crore, police said.

The nominee for all the accounts was Kharat, a former merchant navy officer.

Kharat, who also claimed to be an astrologer, was operating all these accounts and depositing money, which he received from people visiting him for consultation.

In view of these revelations, the Enforcement Directorate, which probes money laundering cases, is likely to enter the inquiry scene.

At least 10 FIRs have been registered against Kharat, who is being probed by a special investigation team. —*PTI*

MP Assembly disqualifies Cong MLA convicted in fraud case

BHOPAL, 3 APRIL

- After deliberations on the night of 2 April, the Vidhan Sabha authorities issued a notification annulling Bharti's membership from the Datia seat, which he won in 2023 by defeating BJP's Narottam Mishra.

Madhya Pradesh Congress MLA Rajendra Bharti has been disqualified from the state legislative assembly following his conviction in a case involving tampering with bank records to secure illegal interest payments, officials announced on Friday.

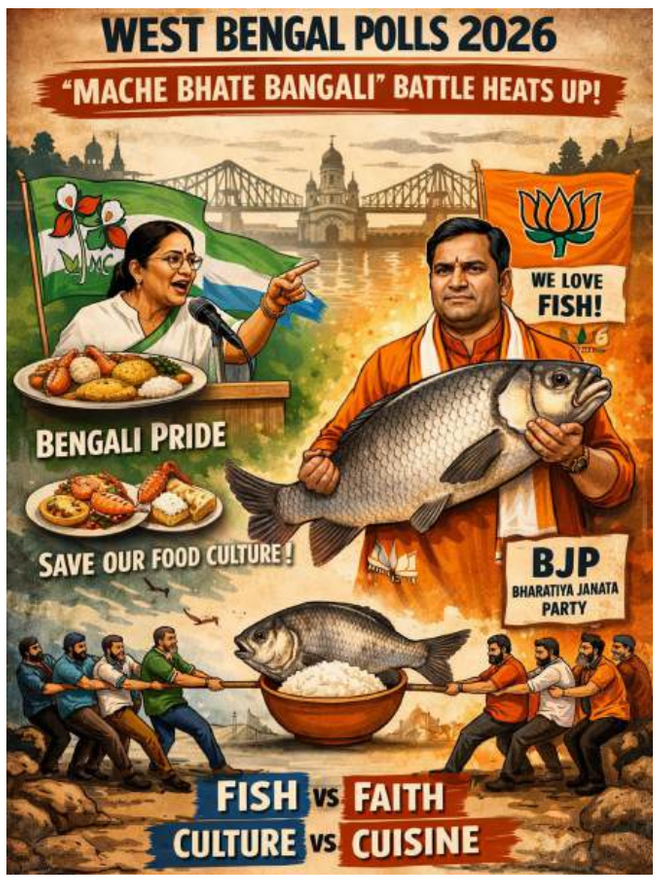
After deliberations on Thursday night, the Vidhan Sabha authorities issued a notification annulling Bharti's membership from the Datia seat, which he won in 2023 by defeating BJP's Narottam Mishra.

The notification, citing a Delhi court order sentencing Bharti to three years' imprisonment and declaring the seat vacant, was issued by Principal Secretary Arvind Sharma on April 2 night and released on Friday.

The court sentenced Bharti and former bank employee Raghuvir Sharan Prajapati to three years' imprisonment and a Rs 1 lakh fine for conspiracy, cheating, forgery and using forged documents between 1998 and 2011.

The case was transferred from MP to Delhi, with the court rejecting Bharti's claim of political targeting, stating it involved forgery and deception long before any rivalry. Proceedings against Bharti's mother were abated . —*PTI*

Kitchen to campaign: Fish takes centre stage in WB



Bidhannagar BJP candidate Sharadwat Mukherjee campaigning with fish, in West Bengal —*SCREENGRAB; AI*

BALLOT BUZZ

In West Bengal's election waters, fish have leapt from the dinner plate to the centre of the political net, with the Trinamool Congress (TMC) trying to hook Bengali pride, and the BJP scrambling not to get caught on the wrong side of the 'mache bhate Bangali' phrase.

From giant katla held aloft at roadshows to ilish, pabda and chingri finding pride of place in political speeches, fish has emerged as an unlikely but potent metaphor in West Bengal's assembly polls, turning food habits into a fierce contest over identity, culture and who represents the "real" Bengali.

The old Bengali phrase 'mache bhate Bangali', which means a Bengali is defined by the consumption of fish and rice, has become this election's de facto slogan for the parties. The TMC has sought to weaponise the sentiment by arguing that the BJP, which it seeks to associate with Hindi speakers and vegetarianism-promoting politics of North India, is culturally alien to West Bengal and, if voted to power, could eventually impose restrictions on fish, meat and eggs.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sharpened the attack at a rally by saying, "They will not let you eat fish. You cannot have meat, you cannot have eggs, you cannot speak in Bengali. If you do, they will call you Bangladeshi", thus linking food, language and Bengali identity into one political argument. The allegation has allowed the TMC to move the campaign away from anti-incumbency, corruption and unemployment and towards a terrain where it feels more comfortable — Bengali sub-nationalism. Fish, in that telling, is no longer merely lunch. It is a badge of Bengali pride.

The party's social media handles have posted photographs of delicacies like ilish bhapa, pabda jhal, chingri malai curry and kosha mangsho after Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced he would spend 15 days in West Bengal for campaigning.

"West Bengal welcomes tourists. Do not miss our delicacies," one TMC post said, in a swipe at Shah that mixed sarcasm with culinary nationalism. Political analyst Maidul Islam said the TMC sees West Bengal "essentially as a Bengali project".

"Within that Bengali project, fish-eating is an important element. When fish markets are attacked elsewhere, or Hindi-speaking leaders wrinkle their noses at fish, it becomes a campaign point. The TMC is saying it is the organic party of Bengalis and therefore organically linked to Bengali food habits," he said.

That argument has acquired traction because West Bengal's relationship with fish goes far beyond cuisine.

In West Bengal, fish is part of every important moment in life — from a baby's first rice-eating ceremony and the gift sent to a groom's house before a wedding to the meal that marks the end of mourning after a 'shraddha'.

According to World Bank data, West Bengal consumes 8.36 lakh tonnes of fish annually, nearly twice the national average, while fish and meat together account for almost a fifth of household food expenditure in the state.

The BJP insists the TMC is deliberately manufacturing fear. Its leaders point out that there is no proposal to ban fish or meat in West Bengal and accuse the ruling party of trivialising the election by reducing it to a menu card.

Yet, significantly, the BJP now finds itself having to publicly prove that it is not anti-fish. Bidhannagar BJP candidate Sharadwat Mukherjee recently campaigned carrying a five kg katla fish through neighbourhoods, telling voters that the BJP would never interfere with Bengali food habits. In Pandaveswar, BJP candidate Jitendra Nath Tiwari filed his nomination papers accompanied by a "fish procession", with supporters carrying baskets of fish while he himself held a large one.

"If promoting West Bengal's culture is drama, I am proud of this drama," Tiwari said.

The spectacle was politically revealing. For years, the BJP projected vegetarian symbolism in many Hindi heartland states. In West Bengal, however, the same party is now campaigning with fish in hand.

Political analyst Suman Bhattacharya said that it showed how deeply the TMC narrative had penetrated.

"The perception that the BJP is against fish and non-vegetarian food has become so strong that party leaders now have to publicly eat fish and campaign with it. That itself shows how their vegetarian politics elsewhere didn't work in West Bengal," he said.

State BJP President Samik Bhattacharya has been equally emphatic. "There is no question of banning fish. Bengalis will eat fish and Biharis will eat mutton. If anyone tries to stop me, I will resist," he said, while accusing the TMC of spreading misinformation.

Remarks by Bihar Deputy CM Vijay Kumar Sinha about restricting the open sale of meat near schools and religious places, together with repeated controversies in BJP-ruled states over meat shops, fish markets and vigilante attacks, have fed the TMC narrative. For many Bengalis, these episodes reinforce the fear that a more homogenised, North Indian, vegetarian-first cultural model could one day be imposed on West Bengal.

A Kolkata-based Indologist said fish occupies a civilisational space in Bengal. "For Bengalis, fish is not merely food. It is memory, ritual and identity. To challenge that is to appear alien to West Bengal itself. And in Hindu scriptures, there is no mention of vegetarianism being linked to religious identity," he said.

As the campaign intensifies, Bengal's electoral battle is increasingly being fought not merely over SIR of electoral rolls, jobs, corruption or governance, but over Bengali identity. In that battle, the humble fish has swum to the centre of Bengal's political pond. —*PTI*

SALAR

How Iranian hackers pose threat to US critical infra

Aichigan may be more than 6,000 miles away from the war in Iran, but virtually speaking, it's well within striking distance.

An Iran-linked group calling itself Handala claimed responsibility for a cyberattack on Portage, Michigan-based medical device maker Stryker Corp., carried out on 11 March, 2026. Handala said the attack was in retaliation for events related to the conflict in Iran.

The cyberattack affected Stryker's internal Microsoft software system, disrupting the company's order processing, manufacturing and shipping.

The Stryker case is notable because it shows how quickly a regional conflict can translate into disruption for organisations far from the battlefield. It also illustrates the vulnerabilities of US organisations, including those involved in critical infrastructure.

Modern critical infrastructure does not only involve the obvious big targets like power plants or water utilities. It also relies on suppliers and service providers that sit one or two links upstream – such as managed information technology providers, cloud and data centre operators and specialised parts suppliers – that keep everything from hospitals to transit systems running.

This is one reason US officials emphasise critical infrastructure as a whole-of-society problem, not a niche government issue. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's "Shields Up" guidance is written for exactly this reality: a world where geopolitical shocks can threaten organisations that did not think they were part of the battlefield.

CYBER OPERATIONS ARE OFTEN ABOUT OPTIONS

When people imagine cyber warfare, many often picture dramatic outcomes. The lights go out. The water turns toxic.

The trains stop. Those scenarios are real risks. But they are not the only objective, and often not the main one. The real strategic value is access.

Cyber access is like a set of keys. If you can get into a network quietly, stay there and learn how it works, you create options for later. You can steal information, map dependencies and position yourself to cause disruption. You can keep the option to strike in your pocket, so that in a crisis, you can cause or credibly threaten to cause harm.

That is why US agencies took the China-linked Volt Typhoon group's hacking activity so seriously. In joint advisories, US officials described a campaign that compromised the information technology systems of organisations across multiple critical infrastructure sectors and used so-called living-off-the-land techniques that can blend into normal administrative activity.

This is an important point. A lot of state-linked cyber activity is not designed to create immediate, visible chaos. It is designed to build leverage.

STATE-SPONSORED CYBERATTACKS

Most state-backed cyber operations, including those carried out by the United States, follow a common sequence.

First, the attackers gain initial access through techniques such as phishing, exploiting known vulnerabilities or abusing weak remote access. Once inside, attackers try to learn where the valuable data and sensitive systems are. They seek higher privileges and move laterally, often using legitimate administrative tools to blend in.

That stealthy manoeuvring is one reason campaigns like Volt Typhoon raised alarms. Defenders can have a hard time distinguishing an intruder from a normal administrator in a busy environment, especially when the intruder is deliberately trying to make their actions look like ordinary activity.

The attackers then establish persistence, meaning they can sustain their access. If the goal is leverage, the attackers want to survive defenders' cleanup efforts after they discover they've been hacked. That can mean gaining multiple footholds, altering authentication settings or gaining access via third parties.

Finally, they choose the effects they want to have. But not every intrusion ends in destruction. Sometimes it ends with data theft, where the prize is information rather than causing downtime.

WHAT DEFENCES DOES THE US HAVE?

The US has a growing defence ecosystem, but it is not a single shield you can switch on.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency encourage organisations to heighten their cybersecurity vigilance during periods of elevated geopolitical risk.

The agency, along with the FBI, the National Security Agency and international partners, also publishes advisories with indicators and recommended mitigations when they see active campaigns. Because critical infrastructure is mostly privately owned, federal defence also depends on partnerships.

Congress has also pushed the private sector toward reporting incidents more quickly. The Cyber Incident Reporting for Critical Infrastructure Act of 2022 sets reporting timelines that include reporting cyber incidents within 72 hours and ransomware payments within 24 hours after payment.

LESSONS FROM THE STRYKER HACK

The Stryker episode is a reminder that cyber operations are now a routine tool that state-linked actors can use to project power during international crises. They can aim at theft, disruption or signalling. Sometimes they hit government networks, and other times they hit private companies that sit inside essential supply chains.

Either way, the consequences can be felt far from the conflict itself.

In cyber conflict, the quiet part – gaining access, establishing persistence and preparing for deployment – typically comes first. The visible disruption often gets headlines, but it is the hidden positioning that sets the stage for offensive cyber operations in a crisis. —*PTI*

LETTERS

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Why 2nd shipping chokepoint could live up to its name 'Gate of Tears'

If you'd never heard of the Strait of Hormuz before, you probably have by now. Iran's effective closure of the waterway, which usually carries about 20 per cent of the world's oil and gas, has put severe pressure on the global economy.

Now, some analysts are warning that a new flashpoint could emerge: the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

That's because on 28 March, the Houthis, a military group that controls large parts of northern Yemen and is aligned with Iran, entered the war, launching missiles towards Israel for the first time since the war with Iran began.

Yemen is situated on one side of the strait, and the Houthis have previously attacked shipping in the Red Sea, causing major disruption in late 2023 and 2024.

Bloomberg now reports Iran has approached the Houthis to prepare for a similar campaign.

WHAT IS THE BAB EL-MANDEB STRAIT?

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is about 30 kilometres wide at its narrowest point. It is situated between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula to the northeast and Eritrea and Djibouti in Africa to the west.

Its name literally means "Gate of Tears" in Arabic, after its famously treacherous sailing conditions.

It has become so important because, along with the Suez Canal in Egypt, it allows ships to transit directly between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean by passing through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Before the Suez Canal's opening in the 19th century, ships had to travel all the way around the southern tip of Africa to join these two points.

An oil tanker leaving Saudi Arabia to go to the Netherlands, for example, only has to travel 12,000 kilometres if it goes via the Red Sea, compared with more than 20,000 kilometres going south around Africa.

As you'd expect, that's much faster too. According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), a trip between the Arabian Sea and the Netherlands that takes 34 days the long way around is shortened to just 19 days.

WHAT PASSES THROUGH IT?

In normal times, as much as 14 per cent of global maritime trade goes through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

Detailed data on what passes through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait is somewhat limited.

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is a critical 26–32km wide maritime chokepoint connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean —*WIKIMEDIA COMMONS*

But fossil fuels are a major component.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that in 2025 about 4.2 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum liquids crossed the Bab al-Mandeb Strait per day. That's about 5 per cent of global production.

In the final quarter of 2025, about 40 per cent of the 3,426 ships passing through the Suez Canal transported fossil fuels: 1,330 oil tankers, 88 liquefied natural gas (LNG) ships.

Bulk and general cargo made up another 40 per cent (1,339 ships), typically transporting agricultural commodities such as corn, wheat and soybeans, and also coal and iron ore. Container ships made about 13 per cent of the traffic (459 ships).

Notably, total traffic through the Red Sea has declined considerably since Houthi attacks on shipping in late 2023 and 2024, even though these attacks have largely stopped.

CAN THE STRAIT BE CLOSED?

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait can't be "closed" entirely. Its narrowest point is still a considerably wide waterway. And unlike the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait is not a "cul-de-sac", where the passage is closed at one end with only one way out. Ships can still exit to the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal.

That's little comfort for those bound for Asia, which would then have to round Africa to do so, adding weeks to the journey. Notably, Saudi Arabia had already built a "Plan B" to avoid the Strait of Hormuz, called the East-West pipeline. This pipeline connects Abqaiq in the north with Yanbu on the Red Sea, and had already begun pumping oil at almost full capacity in response to the conflict.

But oil bound for Asia from this new exit point still has to pass through Bab el-Mandeb to avoid the long way around, meaning it could be disrupted.

WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE

To get a sense of how the Houthis could disrupt shipping again, we can look to the most recent Red Sea crisis.

According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), 67 incidents were recorded between November 2023 and September 2024. Some ships only suffered minor equipment damage. But others faced severe fires, flooding and structural damage after being hit by missiles or drones.

However, there have been relatively few attacks since 2024. And the strait was never totally "closed" per se: some ships continued to pass through throughout the crisis.

THE MERE THREAT OF ATTACKS

These same tactics would probably apply today. But for shipping companies, the mere threat of attacks may be enough to slow or restrict shipping. There are significant risks to civilian crew, who face a threat to life.

Adding to this, insurance costs could become prohibitive enough to close the route in practical terms. Back in 2024, insurance costs were about 0.6 per cent of the value of the cargo on a ship. After the Red Sea crisis, this rose as high as 2 per cent.

The effective closure of both the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb at the same time would be severely disruptive to global supply chains and the global economy. —*The Conversation*

Cuba pardons 2,000 people amid US pressure

HAVANA, 3 APRIL

Cuba said Thursday it had pardoned 2,010 people as the United States under Donald Trump increased pressure with an oil blockade. The government described the move as a "humanitarian gesture" linked to Holy Week and did not mention US tensions. Authorities said foreigners and Cubans were released but provided no names, nor whether protesters convicted of terrorism or public disorder were included. Cuba does not recognise political prisoners, though Prisoners Defended counts 1,214 cases. The blockade has caused blackouts and hardship across the island nation. *—PTI*

UN praises Indians for reopening S Sudan corridor

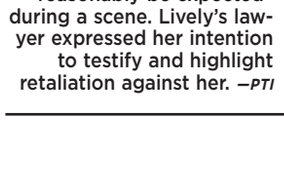
UNITED NATIONS, 3 APRIL

The United Nations praised Indian peacekeepers in South Sudan for reopening a flood-hit supply route. The UNMISS said engineers restored the Malakal–Renk road in Upper Nile State. Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said, "... in South Sudan, amid these difficult times, there are some hopeful developments." He added the work improved mobility and humanitarian access. India, with 1,779 personnel, is the largest troop contributor. Peacekeepers also ran medical, veterinary and outreach camps. Flooding last year affected 1.35 million people and displaced nearly 3,75,600. The restored route enhances aid delivery and stability in vulnerable communities. *—PTI*

IS-linked rebels kill 43 in eastern Congo

GOMA, 3 APRIL

Rebels linked to the Islamic State killed at least 43 people in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, officials said. The Allied Democratic Forces attacked Bafwakoa village, with local estimates putting the toll at 56. "They set fire to houses in the village," said a civil society member. Military spokesman Lt Jules Ngongo said the group targets civilians to avoid direct combat. The ADF, originally from Uganda and tied to IS since 2019, remains active. Congo's army faces multiple rebel groups, including M23. Attacks have intensified near Uganda's border and spread towards Goma and Ituri. Last year, the ADF killed 66 people in another assault. *—PTI*



Judge bins several of Lively's claims against Baldoni

NEW YORK, 3 APRIL

Blake Lively's sexual harassment claims against Justin Baldoni over the film 'It Ends With Us' were dismissed by a federal judge, who upheld three claims, including retaliation, allowing a jury to hear much of the allegations. The ruling, by Judge Lewis J. Liman in Manhattan, followed Lively's December 2024 lawsuit. Baldoni and his company, Wayfarer Studios, countersued Lively and Ryan Reynolds, accusing them of defamation and extortion. The judge ruled Lively was an independent contractor, not protected under Title VII. While some claims may go to trial, the judge said Baldoni's conduct was "not so far beyond what might reasonably be expected" during a scene. Lively's lawyer expressed her intention to testify and highlight retaliation against her. *—PTI*

Iran threatens Gulf bridges as US bombs its largest one

Iran claims to hit Oracle data centre in UAE

DUBAI, 3 APRIL

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-35

The Karaj B1 bridge in Iran was damaged after a US airstrikes on Thursday. The bridge is touted as the tallest in the Middle East *—X @IRIMFA_SPOX*

Iranian media released a list of several bridges in West Asia after US strikes significantly damaged what is described as the tallest bridge in the Middle East.

The semi-official Fars News Agency published the list after two US strikes hit the B1 bridge in the northern Iranian city of Karaj.

The list included: Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Sea Bridge in Kuwait; King Fahd Causeway linking Saudi Arabia to Bahrain; Sheikh Zayed Bridge and Sheikh Khalifa Bridge in the United Arab Emirates; King Hussein Bridge, Damiyah Bridge, and Abdoun Bridge in Jordan

US President Donald Trump posted a video of the bridge being hit on his Truth Social. At least eight people were killed, but the US justified the strikes saying it was disrupting an Iranian weapons route.

However, Iran's Foreign Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said on X that it was a "DAESH/ISIS-style terrorist war crime". He said that Israel-US were deliberately targeting civilian infrastructure.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, meanwhile, said that 70 per cent of Iran's teel production capabilities had been destroyed. He said this would reduce country's revenue and the ability of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) ability to produce missiles.

Meanwhile, the IRGC claimed to have struck a data centre belonging to American tech firm Oracle in Dubai. This comes after Iran threatened dozens of American firms in the region, and has previously struck Amazon's AWS facilities in the region.

The UAE dismissed the claims. However, the UAE, like Iran, has severely limited media connectivity, and Salar could not independently verify the claims.

Meanwhile, sirens sounded in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia said it had destroyed several drones, and Israel reported incoming missiles.

Iran set Kuwait's Mina al-Ahmadi oil refinery, one of the country's largest, on fire.

Kuwait also said an Iranian attack caused "material damage" to a desalination plant. Such plants are responsible for most of the drinking water for Gulf states.

ISRAEL KILLS PEOPLE PRAYING IN LEBANON

In Lebanon, an Israeli drone strike on worshippers leaving Friday prayers in the town of Sohmor, killed two people and wounded 11, according to the state media. At least three UN peacekeepers were injured in a separate strike. *—Agencies*

WAR CASUALTIES MOUNT

- Desalination plant and oil refinery hit in Kuwait.
- Explosions rock Tehran.
- Houthis launch more missiles at Israel.
- Satellite images confirm damage to Iran's Qeshm Island and Doha port.
- Iran's Basij paramilitary is recruiting 12-year-old kids to fight: Amnesty International

The biggest bridge in Iran comes tumbling down, never to be used again. Much more to follow... Bridges... then electric power plants! New regime leadership knows what has to be done

—Donald Trump, US President

Striking civilian infrastructure only conveys the defeat and moral collapse of an enemy in disarray.... Are Americans office sure that they want to turn back the clock (to the stone ages)?... There was no oil or gas being pumped in the Middle East (then)

—Abbas Araghchi, Iran Foreign Minister

Iran is a very bad regime — no discussion about that. But I don't believe that we will fix the situation just by bombings. Look at what happened in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya — we never delivered. Never. Even after 20 years. So you have to respect the sovereignty of people.

—Emmanuel Macron, French President

Working with Oman to 'monitor' Hormuz: Iran

DUBAI, 3 APRIL

Iran claimed on Thursday that its drafting a proposal with Oman to "monitor" Strait of Hormuz. Iranian diplomat Kazem Gharibabadi told state media IRNA that the proposal "intended to facilitate and ensure safe passage and provide better services to ships passing through this route."

It is unclear what the proposal would mean and Oman did not immediately acknowledge it.

The Strait runs through Iranian and Omani territorial waters but is considered an international waterway that should freely allow ships to pass.

Iran's attacks on shipping in the region, as well as reportedly demanding USD 2 million for passage through the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf, have created a stranglehold on the route.

ESCAPE FROM HORMUZ

Llyod's List said that three ships, two Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCCs) and a LNG carrier are attempting to exit the Persian Gulf by going close to Oman's coast. Large ships typically avoid going close to Oman's coast as the water is significantly shallower and requires making large turns. All three ships were Omani. If successful, this would be the first LNG ship to have crossed Hormuz since the war began. A French ship also passed through Hormuz on Friday. *—Agencies*

PAK HIKES PETROL PRICES BY 43%

Pakistan has announced an unprecedented increase of 43 per cent and 55 per cent in the prices of petrol and high-speed diesel (HSD), respectively. The price of petrol has been increased by Rs 137.23 per litre to Rs 458.41 from Rs 321.17, while HSD by Rs 184.49 per litre to Rs 520.35 from Rs 335.86. The price of kerosene was also increased by Rs 34.08 per litre to Rs 457.80.

Russia launched at least 500 drones at Ukraine, which responded by firing nearly 200. At least 5 people were killed *—UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICE*

Russia makes no ground in Ukraine, 1st in 2 yrs

KYIV, 3 APRIL

The Russian army made no territorial gains in Ukraine in March for the first time in two and half years, according to date from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

According to ISW, Russia slowed due to Ukrainian counteroffensives and communication limits after "Russia's ban on using Starlink terminals in Ukraine" and the Kremlin has also tried to restrict access to Telegram – which is popular among Russians fighting on the frontline.

Ukraine also recaptured small areas of land, as both sides are preparing for the next round of peace negotiations, where territorial gains has been a bargaining chip.

DRONE STRIKES CONTINUE

Russian drone strikes killed at least five people in Ukraine on Friday. Russia launched at least 500 drones at Ukraine, officials said, while Kyiv fired nearly 200. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also signalled willingness to have a truce on Easter.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has threatened to withhold military aid to Ukraine if Europe doesn't help open the Strait of Hormuz, Financial Times reported. *—Agencies*

MYANMAR MILITARY COUP LEADER AUNG HLAING ELECTED PRESIDENT

BANGKOK, 3 APRIL

Myanmar's parliament on Friday elected Min Aung Hlaing—the former general who ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in 2021—as the country's new President, formalising the Army's grip on power five years after the coup.

Hlaing, 69, was one of three nominees for the President's post, but was virtually guaranteed the job as lawmakers from military-backed parties and appointed members from the army hold a commanding majority in Parliament.

Hlaing, who holds the rank of senior General, had relinquished his post as commander-in-chief because the constitution prohibits the president from simultaneously holding the top military position. Hlaing had been the military chief since 2011. Under a military-imposed constitution, he held major power even before overthrowing Suu Kyi's government.

This follows a general election held between December and January, which resulted in a lopsided victory for the military-backed USDP. Major Opposition parties, including Suu Kyi's, were either dissolved or refused to participate in the polls, which independent observers deemed neither free nor fair. *—PTI*

US slaps 100% tariffs on patented drugs unless cos strike a deal

NEW YORK, 3 APRIL

US President Donald Trump signed an executive order Thursday that could slap long-threatened pharmaceutical tariffs of up to 100 per cent on some patented drugs from companies that don't reach deals with the government in the coming months.

Companies that have signed a "most favoured nation" pricing deal and are actively building facilities in the US to onshore production of patented pharmaceuticals will have zero tariff. For those that don't have a pricing deal but are building such projects in the US, a 20 per cent tariff will apply but will increase to 100 per cent in four years.

Many bigger companies like Pfizer, Eli Lilly and Bristol Myers Squibb, have already made a deal with the government, and more are expected to follow. Countries may also be able to strike deals.

Trump's order came on the first anniversary of his "Liberation Day", when the Republican unveiled sweeping new tariffs on nearly every country. Those "Liberation Day" tariffs were among the duties the Supreme Court overturned in February. *—PTI*

Trump's budget seeks $1.5T more for defence

Trump proposed boosting defence spending to $1.5 trillion in his 2027 budget, the largest request in decades. This requires curbing money for other programmes, but he boostsed fund for ICE.

Don's ballroom greenlit after judge halted it

Trump's White House ballroom won final approval from the key National Capital Planning Commission on Thursday, days after a federal judge ordered a pause unless Congress voted on it.

DISARRAY IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Hegseth fires Army Chief of Staff, offers no explanation

WASHINGTON, 3 APRIL

- The Pentagon said Randy George will be "retiring" from his position as Chief of Staff, and said that two other Generals were also fired

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has ousted the US Army's top officer and two generals, the Pentagon confirmed Thursday. This marks more than a dozen high-level firings since Hegseth took office. Officials offered no reason for the moves, which come five weeks into US-Israel strikes on Iran amid an open-ended conflict.

Gen Randy George "will be retiring from his position as the 41st Chief of Staff of the Army," said Pentagon spokesperson Sean Parnell. Hegseth also ousted Army Gen David Hodne and Army Maj Gen William Green, according to a Pentagon official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive leadership changes. A reason for their departures was also not given.

Gen Christopher LaNeve will step in as acting Army Chief of Staff. LaNeve was serving as Hegseth's top military aide when President Donald Trump nominated him for Army vice chief of staff last October.

LaNeve's meteoric rise, despite being a two-star general just two years ago, contrasts with George, a West Point-educated infantry officer with combat experience in the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan. He served as top military aide to former defence secretary Lloyd Austin. *—PTI*

Kash, Gabbard to be sacked next?

FBI Director Kash Patel, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard , Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll and Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer may be fired next according to the White House plans, the Atlantic reported. However, Trump has not yet made the final call about any of the individuals, as the government heads for a total reshuffle.

How Bondi's 'mismanagement' of Epstein files led to her ouster

NEW YORK, 3 APRIL

President Donald Trump has removed Pam Bondi as Attorney General and head of the Justice Department (DOJ) amid a massive controversy over her handling of files related to convicted sex offender Jefrey Epstein. For now, Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche will be the acting Attorney General.

Upon taking on the role as Attorney General Bondi, initially fueled expectations by promising to release the "Epstein client list," even showcasing declassified binders at the White House. However, the move backfired as the documents were already largely public information.

After months of anticipation, the DOJ said it wouldn't release additional Epstein material. The reversal drew criticism with many questioning her capability, but Trump defended her.

Congress then forced the DOJ to disclose its investigative files on Epstein, which Trump signed into law.

The released documents exposed highly personal victim information while redacting the names of Epstein's correspondents. Attorney Gloria Allred said Bondi betrayed victims by failing to protect their privacy.

The House Oversight Committee subpoenaed Bondi for 14 April to address the Department's mishandling of the Epstein investigation. Supported by five Republicans and all Democrats, the subpoena signalled bipartisan frustration with her leadership. Bondi attempted to stifle the controversy by defending the Department's actions, insulting Democratic critics, and praising President Trump. *—PTI*

RBI unveils ₹2.54 lakh crore state borrowing plan for Q1

This is part of a 'long-term effort' to stabilise market for securities

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

State governments and Union Territories across the country are expected to raise a total of Rs 2,54,509 crore through market borrowings during the first quarter of the 2026-27 financial year.

According to an indicative calendar released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday, these borrowings will take place between April and June 2026 as part of the states' efforts to manage their financial requirements.

The central bank, acting as the debt manager for the states, has scheduled regular auctions throughout the three months to facilitate the capital raising.

As a feature of this quarter's borrowing plan, the RBI introduced the Benchmark Issuance Strategy (BIS) on a pilot basis, which the bank has decided to implement starting this financial year. This pilot involves nine specific states, including Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh.

These nine states alone are projected to borrow Rs 1,53,900 crore during the quarter under the new framework.

The central bank explained that the move toward a more structured strategy is part of a long-term effort to stabilise the market for state-level securities.

Under this new strategy, the participating states will issue securities within specific benchmark tenor buckets according to the pre-announced schedule. While the nine states in the pilot lead the borrowing volume, the remaining states and Union Territories are scheduled to raise Rs 1,00,609 crore through traditional market borrowing methods during the same period.

The RBI indicated that other states are expected to adopt the benchmark strategy as the program moves forward.

The RBI maintains the authority to modify the auction dates and the specific amounts in consultation with the respective state governments and Union Territories if market conditions require such changes.

The actual amount of borrowings and the details of the States/UTs participating in the auction will be announced two to three days before the actual auction. *—ANI*

'CRUDE THREAT TO RISE'

Markets under-pricing West Asia risk: Jefferies

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Financial markets are failing to fully price in the escalating risks emanating from the West Asia crisis, even as crude oil supply disruptions threaten to intensify, according to a recent Jefferies strategy note.

The report underscores a striking disconnect between geopolitical realities and market behaviour, noting that "the only way to explain why financial markets have not sold off more on the continuing 'Middle East news flow is that investors' base case remains' limited escalation, ' an assumption that is increasingly being challenged by events on the ground.

Jefferies highlights that this complacency persists despite clear signs of intensification, including US military mobilisation and direct conflict dynamics involving Iran.

A central concern flagged is the disruption to critical energy supply routes.

The partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for global oil flows, is already pushing crude prices higher, with broader implications for inflation and global growth.

Jefferies further notes that the market may be underestimating the second-order effects of rising energy costs, particularly on sectors like technology, where "rising energy costs can escalate the cost of data centre construction, given that AI is hugely energy-dependent."

The report also points to broader geopolitical spillovers, including disruptions in the Red Sea and renewed Houthi activity, reinforcing the risk of a multi-front supply shock.

Despite these developments, asset prices have not fully adjusted to reflect the potential for prolonged disruption. *—ANI*

Emirates NBD Bank to buy 74% stake in RBL

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has accorded approval to Dubai-based Emirates NBD Bank to acquire up to a 74 per cent stake in RBL Bank, paving the way for the bank to become a foreign lender.

The approval from RBI came on 1 April with one year's validity, RBL Bank said in a regulatory filing on Thursday.

The approval follows Emirates NBD Bank, the second largest in UAE, expressing its interest in October 2025 to acquire a majority 60 per cent stake in RBL Bank for Rs 26,853 crore.

As per the approval letter, the Emirates NBD (ENBD) would acquire and maintain a shareholding of at least 51 per cent of the paid-up share capital of the RBL Bank and the bank would be classified as a foreign bank in subsidiary mode, with the Investor as its parent foreign bank.

The voting rights of ENBD shall be capped at 26 per cent of the total voting rights of RBL Bank, in accordance with section 12(2) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, it said.

The ENBD is exempted from the requirement of single mode of presence until the Indian branches of the investor are amalgamated with the Bank, or within one year, whichever is earlier, it said.

Earlier in January, fair trade regulator CCI had approved Emirates NBD Bank's proposal to acquire a majority stake in private sector lender RBL Bank. *—PTI*

US' 100% drug tariff has limited impact on India: Biocon CEO

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The recent decision by US President **Donald Trump** to impose a 100 per cent tariff on patented pharmaceutical imports to US is unlikely to cause immediate disruption to Indian drugmakers, as the move largely targets branded medicines while exempting generics and biosimilars, said Siddharth Mittal, CEO and Managing Director of Biocon Limited.

In an exclusive interaction with ANI, Mittal said the tariff action is aimed at boosting domestic manufacturing in the United States but does not significantly impact Indian players in the near term.

"The recent tariff action by President Trump is clearly aimed at incentivising domestic manufacturing in the US. However, the current framework is targeted at branded and patented drugs, with generics and biosimilars largely exempt, which limits any immediate disruption for Indian players like Biocon," he said.

Mittal added that the exclusion of generics provides a cushion for India's pharmaceutical exports, particularly to the US, where Indian companies have a strong presence.

"In the near term, the exclusion of generics offers a buffer, ensuring continuity in exports of low-cost medicines that form the backbone of India's pharmaceutical trade with the US," he said.

The US has recently announced sweeping trade measures targeting patented pharmaceutical imports and metals, with a 100 per cent tariff applicable to patented drug imports from countries, including India. *—ANI*

Govt eyes making more induction heaters

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The government on Friday held discussions on measures to encourage companies to ramp up production of induction heaters and compatible utensils amid rising demand for these products due to concerns over LPG availability following the West Asia crisis, an official said.

The crisis has disrupted the movement of ships carrying oil and gas through the Strait of Hormuz, raising concerns over cooking gas supplies and prompting people to rush to buy induction heaters and compatible utensils.

The meeting, chaired by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, was attended by senior officials, including Power Secretary Pankaj Agarwal, Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Lav Agarwal, and Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Secretary Amardeep Singh Bhatia.

The demand for these goods is increasing, and they are being sold as hot cakes, the official added.

Sales of induction cooktops and electric kettles have surged in the wake of cooking gas supply concerns due to the war in West Asia, according to industry players. *—PTI*

Industry hails petrochemical duty exemption

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Industry leaders and experts have praised the Indian government's decision to grant a full customs duty exemption on critical petrochemical products until 30 June, 2026, to stabilise supply chains & reduce costs amid West Asia crisis. Sudarshan Jain of the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance highlighted the crisis's impact on energy and freight, thanking the government for its proactive measures. Siddhartha Rajagopal of the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council called the exemption timely, supporting stability and competitiveness. *—ANI*

OpenAI buys Sam Altman's favourite tech podcast TBPN

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

OpenAI has announced the acquisition of the technology news podcast TBPN. The move aims to bring a specialised editorial team into OpenAI's strategy division to promote broader discussions about AI's impact. Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, said on X that "TBPN is my favourite tech show. We want them to keep that going and do what they do so well. I don't expect them to go any easier on us, I am sure I'll do my part to help enable that with occasional stupid decisions."

Fidji Simo, OpenAI's Applications CEO, confirmed the acquisition, noting the team's "deep audience understanding and ability to convene influential voices across technology, business, and culture." Hosted by Jordi Hays and John Coogan, TBPN is known for daily AI and builder community conversations.

Simo emphasised that "we're not a typical company" and that OpenAI's mission requires a space for constructive AI discussions. TBPN will retain editorial independence, managing its own programming and guests, with autonomy protected in the agreement. *—ANI*

Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a meeting, in Lucknow, on Friday *—PTI*

Adani meets Yogi, backs UP's $1T economy plan

LUCKNOW, 3 APRIL

Industrialist Gautam Adani met Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and expressed support for the state's economic growth targets. Adani shared a post on X praising the roadmap for transforming UP into a USD 1 trillion economy by 2030, expanding to USD 6 trillion by 2047. "Some visions reshape nations.

Hearing Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath lay out the roadmap for Viksit Uttar Pradesh was an unforgettable moment. A USD 1 trillion economy by 2030. USD 6 trillion by 2047. This is a declaration of what UP is capable of becoming," Adani said.

The Adani Group aims to contribute through investments in power, defence, airports, logistics, industrial parks, and data centres. *—PTI*

Amazon to impose 3.5% surcharge on third-party sellers

NEW YORK, 3 APRIL

Amazon is set to impose a 3.5 per cent fuel and logistics surcharge on third-party sellers using its platform from later this month, due to increased fuel prices since the Iran conflict began. The temporary charge will start on 17 April for many sellers utilising Amazon's fulfilment services, the company confirmed in an email to The Associated Press.

Amazon stated that "elevated costs in fuel and logistics have increased the cost of operating across the industry." While the Seattle-based firm has absorbed these costs so far, it explained that "when costs remain elevated," it introduces surcharges to partially recover expenses. The surcharge will be "meaningfully" lower than those by other major carriers.

The surcharge applies to US and Canadian sellers using Fulfilment by Amazon, with additional charges for Buy with Prime and Multi-Channel Fulfillment from 2 May. *—PTI*

Vedanta arm HZL's metal production rises in Q4

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Vedanta group firm HZL has reported an increase in the production of mined metal and refined metal, but a slight decrease in silver production in the fourth quarter of FY26.

The company's mined metal production increased by two per cent to 3,15,000 tonnes and its refined metal output rose by five per cent to 2,82,000 tonnes in the January-March quarter of FY26.

Mined metal production refers to extracting raw ore from the earth and producing a concentrate that contains impurities. Refined metal production is the subsequent purification process, enhancing the grade to over 99 per cent purity for industrial use.

In a statement, Hindustan Zinc Ltd (HZL) has said that its silver production dropped marginally by 0.2 per cent to 176 tonnes in the latest fourth quarter compared to 177 tonnes produced in the year-ago period. The company's wind power generation also dropped by 11 per cent to 56 million units in the reporting quarter from 63 million units in the year-ago period.

HZL is the world's largest integrated zinc producer and is amongst the top five silver producers globally. The company supplies to more than 40 countries and holds a market share of about 75 per cent of the primary zinc market in India. *—PTI*

AMID WEST ASIA CRISIS

Rising war-risk insurance cost deepens airlines' woes

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The ongoing West Asia crisis is beginning to impact aviation economics, with airlines now facing rising war-risk insurance costs. The conflict is not only disrupting global energy markets but also increasing the cost of operating flights in sensitive airspaces, as insurers move to price in elevated geopolitical risks.

On the question of whether war-risk insurance has gone up post the West-Asia crisis, an airline industry source told ANI that "Previously, Indian carriers did not have dedicated war risk insurance coverage. However, due to the ongoing Iran-Israel conflict, insurers have introduced war risk premiums for flights operating in the affected region".

The source went on to mention that "Currently, the additional war risk premium stands at approximately Rs 30,00,000 per round trip for a narrow-body aircraft and Rs 90,00,000 per round trip for a wide-body aircraft".

The additional insurance burden comes at a time when airlines are already grappling with a sharp surge in fuel costs. Indian carriers have begun revising fuel surcharges across both domestic and international routes to offset the impact.

Under the revised domestic structure, fuel charges have been linked to travel distance. Flights covering 0 to 500 kilometres now attract a charge of Rs 275, while routes between 501 and 1,000 kilometres are priced at Rs 400. Charges rise to Rs 600 for distances between 1,001 and 1,500 kilometres, Rs 800 for 1,501 to 2,000 kilometres, and Rs 950 for flights exceeding 2,000 kilometres.

- Under the revised domestic structure, fuel charges have been linked to travel distance. Flights covering 0 to 500 kilometres now attract a charge of Rs 275, while routes between 501 and 1,000 kilometres are priced at Rs 400.

Alongside high fuel prices, airlines are now facing fresh cost pressures that could impact earnings. *—ANI*

-PTI

Abhishek Sharma fined 25 per cent of his match fee

KOLKATA, 3 APRIL

Sunrisers Hyderabad vice-captain Abhishek Sharma has been fined 25 per cent of his match fees and has also accumulated one demerit point for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during his team's IPL match against Kolkata Knight Riders here. He admitted to the Level 1 offence under Article 2.3 and accepted the match referee's sanction. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the match referee's decision is final and binding. He scored 48 runs off 21 deliveries to get SRH to a flier in the powerplay. SRH registered their first win of IPL 2026, with a thumping 65-run win, with Abhishek playing his part with the bat.—*PTI*

Sudarshan tied 31st after Rd1 of Texas Open

SAN ANTONIO, 3 APRIL

India-born Canadian golfer Sudarshan Yellamaraju opened with a roller-coaster three-under 69 to be tied-31st at the Valero Texas Open here. The leader at the end of the first day was Mark Hubbard. Hubbard carded a seven-under 65 after starting his round on the front nine. He dropped his only bogey on the fourth hole before striking eight birdies in the round to close the day at seven-under par.

Yellamaraju started his round with three straight birdies on the 10th, 11th, and 12th before dropping shots on the 15th and 18th. He picked another birdie on the 17th hole..—*PTI*

PSB seeks threefold increase in annual sports budget

KARACHI, 3 APRIL

The state-controlled Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) has requested Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif to increase its annual budget from 1.2 billion rupees to 4.9 billion rupees to keep up with the ever-changing demands of national and international sporting events. The decision to increase the annual budget was taken at the 36th annual general body meeting of the PSB in Islamabad this week to strengthen the sports ecosystem in Pakistan. Compared to neighbouring India and other countries in Asia, the government's budget for sports is considered the lowest, leading to just one gold medal in the Olympic Games since 1984.—*PTI*

-PTI

Bogey free Kochhar lies T-2 in Japan, Jeev makes cut

CHIBA, 3 APRIL

India's Karandeep Kochhar fired a flawless 6-under 65 in the second round to propel himself to the Tied-2 position at the halfway stage at the International Series Japan at the Caledonian Golf Club here Friday.

Kochhar's second successive bogey-free round, punctuated with six birdies, meant that he jumped 7 places from his overnight Tied-9th at the USD 2 million event, and just one shot behind leader Hongtaek Kim of Korea.

Meanwhile, Indian legend Jeev Milkha Singh, a two-time Asian Tour Order of Merit winner, showed his class today by making his first cut on the Asian Tour since 2024. The 54-year-old, who now plays mainly on the Senior Tours, returned a 69 to finish one under par, right at the cutline.—*PTI*

DC seek top-order stability against MI

DC confident against MI in their first home fixture

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The spotlight will firmly be on Delhi Capitals' top order when they square off against a confident Mumbai Indians in their first home fixture of the IPL 2026 season here on Saturday.

DC, who shuffled as many as seven opening combinations last year, had hoped for greater stability this season, but early signs suggest the issue persists.

Chasing a modest 142 against Lucknow Super Giants in their opener, the Capitals' top order crumbled swiftly, with KL Rahul falling for a first-ball duck, while Nitish Rana and Pathum Nissanka departed in quick succession, leaving the side tottering at 26 for four. While Rizvi's fearless strokeplay stood out, the vulnerability at the top is a concern, particularly against a Mumbai attack marshalled by the redoubtable Jasprit Bumrah. The spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and skipper Axar Patel, as expected, applied the squeeze through the middle overs, ensuring the opposition never broke free.

This blend of pace variations and spin control will be key for Delhi against MI's power-packed batting line-up that includes the likes of Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, and Tilak Varma. MI will enter the contest brimming with confidence after snapping a 14-year opening-match jinx with a record chase against the Kolkata Knight Riders. Rohit turned back the clock, scoring a fiery 78, marking his return to T20 cricket in emphatic fashion. Fellow opener Ryan Rickelton, who was picked ahead of the more experienced Quinton de Kock, provided solid support with a belligerent 81 and is likely to keep his place. Their bowling, though expensive, had its moments. Shardul Thakur picked up three crucial wickets, while Bumrah and Trent Boult kept things tight. Mumbai used Suryakumar as an impact player due to a minor groin concern, and it remains to be seen whether the Indian T20I skipper is fit to play a full role in the Feroz Shah Kotla come Saturday. The match starts at 3:30 pm IST. —*PTI*

Nitish credits 'special person' for bowling transformation

Sunrisers Hyderabad's India all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy has credited a "special person" for helping him rediscover his rhythm with the ball after a difficult, injury-hit phase, but chose to keep the identity under wraps for now. The 22-year-old all-format player, who has been seen as a potential successor to India's premier pace-bowling all-rounder Hardik Pandya, has had his progress stalled by recurring fitness issues over the past year. Multiple setbacks, including a neck spasm and a left quadriceps injury in 2025, meant he missed crucial game time in the build-up to the 2026 T20 World Cup, where Shivam Dube eventually got the nod as the second seam-bowling all-rounder.

Rahane says agenda, jealousy driving strike-rate criticism after KKR's defeats

Kolkata Knight Riders captain Ajinkya Rahane has hit back at criticism around his strike rate, suggesting that there is a "certain agenda" and an element of "jealousy" behind the chatter.Questions on his strike rate came up after KKR slumped to a 65-run loss to Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Thursday. Chasing a steep 227, the home side never had any impactful partnership despite a promising start and folded for 161 in 16 overs to remain winless so far this season. The loss placed the focus on Rahane's own performance and strike rate. The KKR skipper, who managed 8 off 10 balls on Thursday

GT pace unit face Sooryavanshi Test

Season two of 'Vaibhav Kand' has started

AHMEDABAD, 3 APRIL

Young talent Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is up against a formidable pace attack –*PTI*

A pace attack comprising Kagiso Rabada, Prasidh Krishna and Mohammed Siraj does bear an intimidating look, but the trio will have its task cut out when 'Boy Wonder' Vaibhav Sooryavanshi faces them on a batting featherbed with Rajasthan Royals starting as favourites against Gujarat Titans in an IPL match here on Saturday.

Season two of "Vaibhav Kand" has started with the 15-year-old demolishing the Chennai Super Kings attack for a 15-ball-50, but that was in a chase of 127 and against a poor-quality domestic attack.

Sooryavanshi will once again try to meet fire with fire, but there will be three international owlers of repute in Rabada, Siraj and Prasidh, who would like to test the batting flagbearer for the 'Gen Alpha'.

The problem with the GT line-up is their top three batters, who aren't exactly scoring at a 200-plus strike-rate. Both skipper Gill (39 off 27 balls) and Buttler (38 off 33 balls) didn't look in their element against Punjab Kings at Mullanpur. Sudharsan (13 off 11 balls) is also trying to get into the groove post-injury break.

It doesn't help either that the top three on whom the Titans' batting hinges haven't exactly been in great touch and are fighting their own little demons.

Worse, their Indian middle order comprising Shahrukh Khan, Washington Sundar and Rahul Tewatia doesn't inspire confidence of the highest order.

Washington, a player highly rated for his multi-dimensional skills and who was also recently a part of the T20 World Cup-winning squad, has been an enigma in this format. With 529 runs and a batting strike-rate of 125 over 67 IPL games in the past decade, along with 40 wickets at an economy rate of 7.71, the Tamil Nadu man in the shortest format has been at best a bits and pieces cricketer, who doesn't fit any particular role or slot.

The match starts at 7:30 pm — *PTI*

Klaasen rules out int'l comeback

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

South Africa's swashbuckling batter Heinrich Klaasen has officially ruled out an international comeback, confirming his retirement to prioritise family time after toying with the idea for a brief period.

Klaasen, 34, had retired from all forms of international cricket last June, following his omission from South Africa's central contracts, stepping aside to focus on playing in T20 leagues.

Now, despite experiencing "FOMO" (fear of missing out) during the 2026 T20 World Cup, the Protea, known for his belligerence with the bat, said he is not returning.

In a video posted by the IPL on social media, Klaasen spoke with his Sunrisers Hyderabad teammate Nitish Kumar Reddy regarding his future in the game.

"It was a thought for about two weeks. And then we decided against it," Klaasen said.

"Obviously, my family plays a big role in it. I've missed my friends when they did extremely well in the World Cup. But I had a little bit more FOMO, and I wanted to come back.

"I spoke to Aiden (Markram), actually. He said if he's capped, then I will definitely come back. But after the World Cup, I realised it's not going to happen. So, I'm not coming back."

Klaasen had retired from Test cricket earlier in 2024.

He last played internationally during the 2025 Champions Trophy, where South Africa lost the semifinal to New Zealand by 50 runs. Klaasen struck a brisk fifty as Sunrisers Hyderabad defeated Kolkata Knight Riders by 65 runs in their Indian Premier League match in Kolkata on Thursday. —*PTI*

67 MINUTES, 44 SECONDS

Nakamura registers 2nd-longest move in FIDE Candidates history

CYPRUS, 3 APRIL

American GM Hikaru Nakamura spent over one hour making a move during a FIDE Candidates 2026 match against Uzbekistan's Javokhir Sindarov on Friday in Cyprus.

To be exact, Nakamura utilised 67 minutes, 44 seconds to make his 13th move of the game. As per Chess.com, only one player has previously used up more time for a move in Candidates history Russian GM Alexander Grischuk, who took 72 minutes to make a move against China's Wang Hao in 2021.

Nakamura's long thinking was reflective of his position in the game and also his struggling start to the Candidates tournament.

The top-seeded Nakamura was taken aback by a sharp preparation from Sindarov, who is currently in sole lead of the tournament. Despite spending a staggering amount of time, Nakamura chose a move that was flagged by the Stockfish engine as an inaccuracy, affecting his game evaluation position.

Heading into the fifth round, Nakamura had just 1.5 points, having lost his opener and then drawn the next three games. —*PTI*

KANE RULED OUT OF BAYERN MATCH

LONDON, 3 APRIL

Harry Kane will miss Bayern Munich's Bundesliga match at Freiburg this weekend but should be fit for its Champions League clash with Real Madrid next week, coach Vincent Kompany said Friday.

Kane missed England's friendly defeat by Japan this week with an ankle problem and has not recovered in time to face Freiburg on Saturday. Bayern takes on Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu in its Champions League quarterfinal first leg on Tuesday. —*PTI*

Advani stuns Shivam to enter semis

LUDHIANA, 3 APRIL

Ace cueist Pankaj Advani, winner of the 9-ball event three days ago, powered into the semifinals of the 10-ball national championships, stunning reigning champion Shivam Arora here on Friday.

Advani carried far too many guns for Arora in the quarterfinals, reflected in his lopsided 8-2 victory, and it set up a last-four showdown with fellow PSPB cueist Shahbaaz Adil Khan.

The latter prevailed by a similar margin over Punjab's Sumesh Jhangra in the other quarters.

The other semifinal will be played between Railways' Pushpender Singh and Aayush Kumar of Punjab. —*PTI*

Portugal finalise FIFA WC prep with Nigeria friendly

MILAN, 3 APRIL

Portugal will complete its FIFA World Cup 2026 preparations with a friendly against Nigeria on 10 June, the Portuguese Football Federation said.

The federation did not announce a venue for the warm-up game, but Portuguese media said on Friday it would be held in Leiria. Portugal has already scheduled a friendly against Chile on 6 June at the National Stadium in Oeiras.

As part of its buildup to the World Cup, Portugal drew 0-0 with tournament co-host Mexico at the reopening of the Azteca Stadium on Saturday and beat the US 2-0 in Atlanta on Tuesday.

Portugal's opening Group K game is on 17 June against the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who eliminated Nigeria in the qualifiers, followed by Uzbekistan on 23 June, with both games in Houston. It plays Colombia on 27 June in Miami in its final group game. The World Cup runs from 11 June to 19 July in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. —*PTI*

Nikhat, Priya, and Preeti reach Asian Boxing C'ships semifinals

Nikhat Zareen –*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

ULAANBAATAR, 3 APRIL

Nikhat Zareen, Priya, and Preeti Pawar qualified for the semifinals of the Asian Boxing Championships, assuring India of at least three medals here on Friday.

Nikhat was in complete control in the women's 51kg quarterfinal, sealing a first-round RSC (referee stops contest) victory over Xian Baguhin from the Philippines in a dominant outing.

Nikhat will face a stern challenge in the semifinals against China's Wu Yu, who won the 2024 Olympics gold medal.

In the women's 60kg category, Priya showcased composure and maturity to defeat China's Chengyu Yang 4-1. Priya will take on Mongolia's Namuun Monkhor for a place in the final.

Meanwhile, in the women's 54kg category, Preeti, the gold medallist at the World Boxing Cup Finals, produced one of the most clinical performances of the fifth day.

Preeti defeated Mongolia's Mungun Tsetseg with a 5-0 unanimous decision victory, setting up a semifinal contest against Im Aeji.

Meanwhile, in the men's 70kg category, Deepak exited the competition following a 1-4 loss to Jordan's Zeyad Eashash in the quarterfinals. —*PTI*

ROMANIA'S GREAT MIRCEA LUCESCU, 80, IS STABLE

BUCHAREST, 3 APRIL

Former Romania coach Mircea Lucescu reportedly suffered a heart attack on Friday morning at the hospital where he is being treated.

The 80-year-old Lucescu, who left the national team on Thursday, is in stable condition. Lucescu had been hospitalized on Sunday after falling ill at training with a heart problem, three days after his team lost a World Cup qualifying playoff against Turkey.

The University Emergency Hospital Bucharest released a statement on Friday without naming Lucescu for legal reasons, but local media reported that the Romanian great is the patient concerned. —*PTI*

AFTER CRASH

Tiger told cop he was talking to President

NEW YORK, 3 APRIL

After crashing his SUV last week in Florida, Tiger Woods took out his phone and told a deputy, "I was just talking to the President," according to body camera footage released on Thursday showing Woods' arrest on a DUI charge.

The phone conversation was not captured on video, but Woods could be heard saying, "Thank you so much," as he hung up and the deputy approached. It wasn't clear if Woods was referring to President Donald Trump, whose former daughter-in-law, Vanessa Trump, is dating Woods.

Police bodycam footage released by the Martin County, Fla., Sheriff's Office shows golfer Tiger Woods being taken into custody -*PTI*

Shortly after the golfer's March 27 arrest, Trump was asked about Woods and told reporters: "I feel so bad. He's got some difficulty. A very close friend of mine. He's an amazing person. Amazing man. But, some difficulty."

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether Trump spoke to Woods after the crash.

The footage also shows how Woods appeared to be astonished as he was handcuffed after failing a sobriety test, and a video from the back of the patrol car shows the handcuffed golfer hiccupping, yawning, and repeatedly appearing to nod off during the 15-minute ride.

Woods told authorities he was looking at his phone and changing the radio station when his speeding Land Rover clipped the back of a truck and rolled onto its side on a residential road on Jupiter Island. —*PTI*